

Menopause and Menstrual Health: Line Managers Guide



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1. Aim

This document will guide you as a line manager when supporting staff whose menopause and menstrual health related symptoms impact their ability to work comfortably. It will also help you promote good menopause and menstrual health awareness.

We recommend that this resource be used with the [Workplace Adjustments Guide](#). Together, they will help you to:

- Promote an inclusive and supportive working environment where staff feel confident in raising issues on how their menopause or menstrual health related symptoms impact them.
- Be confident about your role in managing staff who may need additional workplace support due to the impact of their menopause or menstrual health related symptoms.
- Identify appropriate workplace changes or adjustments to support staff so they can remain in the workplace.

Although the terms 'woman' and 'women' are used throughout, this guide is inclusive of transgender, non-binary, and intersex staff who may also experience menopause and menstrual health related symptoms.

Staff and managers should look at [NHS Inform](#) and the [Menopause and Menstrual Health: Guidance for Employers](#) resources. If concerns about your staff member's health remain or they continue to experience troublesome symptoms, we encourage them to seek professional medical advice through the following:

- General Practice
- Occupational Health Services (OHS)
- A Community Pharmacy

Whilst adjustments can and should be made, women must be supported to take time off if needed.

2. Staff member's role

If someone is experiencing symptoms impacting their ability to work, they can speak to their manager. Discussing personal issues can feel awkward, and the staff member may feel uncomfortable talking to you. In these circumstances, they can reach out to others they may feel more comfortable talking to, such as the following:

- Another manager
- Trusted colleagues
- Human resources
- Staff assistance groups
- OHS
- Trade union representatives

There may also be other local menopause or menstrual health support groups and initiatives available within your organisation. It could be helpful for the staff member to think about what supports and adjustments would benefit them. Their individual needs can then be discussed during the meeting. Information about types of workplace adjustments that might be suitable, can be found in the [Workplace Adjustment Guide](#). All staff should be encouraged to maintain a positive and supportive working environment for themselves and their colleagues. Everyone should be treated with dignity and respect and offer support to others where they feel it is appropriate.

3. Line manager's role

Line managers are usually the first point of contact if someone needs to discuss an issue or concern impacting their ability to work comfortably.

However, we recognise that menopause and menstrual health are very personal issues. Some people may feel embarrassed or anxious about discussing them and how they might affect their health and work. We recognise that other factors, such as cultural backgrounds or neurodivergence, can make it harder for someone to disclose their situation or to seek support.

As a line manager, you should be willing to discuss openly with staff who disclose they are experiencing menopause or menstrual health related symptoms. You should respond sensitively and appropriately and work with staff to find the most appropriate level of support for their wellbeing needs. If you need assistance in these discussions, talk to your employer, as they may have local training and guidance available.

Regular informal monthly conversations help build a rapport with staff. These discussions also provide a 'safe space' where they can talk about anything affecting their ability to carry out their work, including their personal health.

Every individual's experience of menopause and menstrual health is unique to them. Only some people will need additional support at work to help them manage symptoms. However, those who require help should be supported as they would for any other issue impacting their health, wellbeing, and workplace experience.

4. How to approach a conversation about menopause/menstrual health

Conversations may be initiated by the staff member but may also be initiated by the line manager if they notice changes in their staff's wellbeing at work. If you have concerns about someone's wellbeing or performance, ask general, open questions such as, 'How are you doing at the moment?' This allows the member of staff to decide whether they want to disclose any symptoms or health issues they may be experiencing.

Key Takeaway:

Conversations can be prompted by the member of staff or by their line manager. It is key that both parties can discuss sensitive topics in a safe environment, where everyone can be confident of an empathetic and confidential discussion.

The first interaction that a staff member has with you about menopause or menstrual health can set the tone for their experience. It can take a staff member time to feel confident to initiate a conversation. Therefore, you should receive an initial disclosure of difficulty in the workplace with understanding and empathy.

Of course, not all line managers will be well informed about the menopause or menstrual health. If a staff member speaks to you about related challenges they face in the workplace, it is ok to be sympathetic but open about a lack of knowledge. It would help to inform yourself about the issues your staff member is managing. There's lots of information about menopause and menstrual health on the [NHS Inform Women's Health Platform](#) and in the [Definitions and Symptoms Guide](#).

The conversation should help you find out how the staff member is feeling. You should identify any adjustments or additional support that would be helpful to them. Remember to:

- Approach conversations with empathy
- Try not to be embarrassed by the issues raised
- Be sensitive about how the individual is feeling

The most important thing is to create an environment where the staff member feels comfortable talking about the challenges they're experiencing. You should listen, respond appropriately and provide reassurance.

Only some conversations will result in the need for formal adjustments. Some people may just want to talk things through. There is no expectation that you should have all the answers. An awareness of the symptoms and the types of adjustments and support available will help you and your staff feel more comfortable and confident during the conversation.

The easier you make it for someone to open up to you, the easier it will be for you to work together to identify any adjustments or support they might need in the workplace. The adjustments available will depend on the workplace and work environment. You can find more information on this in the [Workplace Adjustments Guide](#).

Remember:

It is important not to make assumptions about a person's health or ask them a direct question about their symptoms. Many women will feel embarrassed or not want to discuss their particular symptoms and their impact on their health and work. However, most people will appreciate a genuine conversation about how they are.

5. Top tips – conversations with staff

- Make sure you have a quiet and private space where you won't be interrupted.
- Switch off notifications on phones and laptops.
- Make sure you have sufficient time to talk without the staff member feeling rushed.
- Allow them to explain their situation in their own time and in their own way.
- Ask open, non-judgmental questions and avoid making assumptions.
- Maintain good eye contact and focus on the person, not the problem.
- Listen actively and carefully and show empathy and understanding.
- Explore options for adjustments and support together and avoid being prescriptive.
- Agree on an action plan and a timeline for review.
- Keep a secure record of the discussion.
- Signpost to any internal support services that may be available, such as Staff Assistance Programmes.
- Encourage staff to talk to others through established staff networks. Talking to others who may have/are going through a similar experience can empower staff and give them the confidence to discuss this topic further.
- Give information on external support services if appropriate.
- Encourage staff to seek professional medical advice through their General Practice or Community Pharmacy if they are concerned about their health or continue to experience bothersome symptoms.
- Utilise the resources available on [Menopause and Menstrual Health: Guidance for Employers](#).

Remember:

Discussions about any health condition should be treated as confidential. If information is to be shared with others, either in their team or with OHS, the staff member's explicit consent must be requested and given.

6. Workplace support and adjustments

Employers have legal duties to be aware of in relation to the menopause and menstrual health. These are the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#) and [Health and Safety at Work Act \(1974\)](#) which require employers to treat staff fairly and ensure their staff's safety, health and welfare at work. More information around this legislation can be found in the **Menopause, Menstrual Health and the Law** section of the [Workplace Adjustments Guide](#).

Workplace adjustments work best when considered collaboratively. As a manager, you should encourage an open discussion with your staff member. You should discuss workplace adjustments that might be appropriate for them and what they think would work best to allow them to continue working comfortably. It is important to reassure your staff member that adjustments will not affect performance reviews. It is recognised that not all adjustments will be suitable or appropriate for all workplace environments.

Some examples of possible adjustments include:

- Access to food and drink
- Access to washroom facilities
- Flexible breaks, working hours and working location
- Access to period products
- Access to their own pain medication and somewhere suitable to store this
- Availability of fans
- Access to an open window
- Better ventilation
- Access to alternative uniform options, subject to any mandatory requirements of your role.
- Allowing hot water bottles, heat pads, and TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation) machines.

You can find further detail on possible adjustments in the [Workplace Adjustments Guide](#).

If you have access to OHS, seeking their advice may be helpful when preparing for a conversation about menopause or menstrual health related symptoms. Staff may prefer to self-refer for advice. A management referral to OHS could be considered where any locally agreed adjustments have not been sufficient or additional health and work concerns are identified.

Keep a written record of any specific needs and agreed adjustments, and make sure you have regular discussions with your staff. This will help ensure adjustments continue to meet their needs, as symptoms can fluctuate over time.

7. Managing performance and absence recording

Performance management is not an annual one-off discussion but an ongoing, informal dialogue between you and your staff member. Having a good relationship with your staff encourages open conversations where health concerns can be discussed and adjustments identified and put in place promptly, helping the individual perform to their full potential. These should be monitored regularly and adjusted as needed. You may find the [Information and Resources](#) guide helpful.

For an example of a Menopause and Menstrual Health Policy for your employer, please see the [NHSScotland Menopause and Menstrual Health Workplace Policy](#).

You can find further information on the National Wellbeing Hub website:
www.nationalwellbeinghub.scot