



Managing the Menopause in the Workplace

NASUWT

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Menopause awareness



Employers have been slow to recognise that women of menopausal age may need special consideration and for too long it has simply been seen as a private matter. As a result, it is very rarely discussed and many managers will have no awareness of the issues involved. This means many women feel they have to hide their symptoms and will be less likely to ask for the adjustments that may help them.¹

The majority of women will experience some or all of the symptoms of the menopause at some point in their lives and the NASUWT believes that, as teaching is a predominately female profession, addressing the menopause should be a high priority in all workplaces.

The menopause affects every woman differently and so there is no 'one size fits all' solution to it.

Some women experience few symptoms whilst others experience such severe symptoms that it impacts negatively on both their home and working lives. It should also be noted that some women experience sudden menopause after surgery, chemotherapy or radiotherapy.

The menopause is a natural part of ageing that usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 years of age. It occurs as a direct result of a woman's oestrogen levels declining. In the UK, the average age for a woman to reach menopause is 51.

The menopause is a recognised occupational health issue and should therefore be addressed at school and college level.

¹ TUC – *Supporting working women through the menopause*, 2013



Supporting working women through the menopause

The 2013 TUC report, *Supporting working women through the menopause*, found that 45% of managers did not recognise problems associated with the menopause and that work was responsible for making the following conditions worse:

- hot flushes (53%);
- headaches (46%);
- tiredness and a lack of energy (45%);
- sweating (39%);
- anxiety attacks (33%);
- aches and pains (30%);
- dry skin and eyes (29%).

Respondents to the TUC survey highlighted the fact that stress increased their symptoms (49%).² The NASUWT research showed 90% of teachers also stating that workload was their biggest concern in teaching.³ It is little wonder that women teachers experiencing symptoms of the menopause often feel they have no alternative but to resign from their post.

As with any long-term health condition, workplaces need helpful and sympathetic managers and colleagues.

² TUC – *Supporting working women through the menopause*, 2013

³ NASUWT – *The Big Question 2016*



Women can be affected in different ways, but workplace factors that make life more difficult for women experiencing the symptoms of 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;
- intrusive sickness monitoring procedures;
- negative attitudes;
- unsympathetic management.

All workplaces should have an effective gender-sensitive policy that is entirely consistent with the statutory provisions of Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work Act (NI) Order 1978, the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations (NI) 1993, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (NI) 2000 and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998).



Providing a gender-sensitive environment

Employers should demonstrate compliance with their statutory duties and provide a gender-sensitive environment by:

- undertaking appropriate risk assessments. They should consider the specific needs of menopausal women and ensure that the working environment will not make their symptoms worse;
- providing awareness training and guidance for managers;
- providing paid time off for treatments such as hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) (for moods and anxiety);
- if necessary, providing flexible working patterns and implementing 'reasonable adjustments' to workplaces. Menopausal women may experience intervals of feeling unwell so managers should take an understanding approach to reasonable requests. It should be stressed that women suffering from menopause-related sickness absence should suffer no detriment if they need time off;
- providing adjustable heating and ventilation systems;
- ensuring that there are flexible break times and adequate access to drinking water, toilet facilities, a quiet rest room and secure staff-changing and washing facilities;
- providing a 'go-between' employee assistance plan for employees who feel uncomfortable discussing their medical concerns with their managers;
- ensuring that any absence management procedures clearly indicate flexibility with regards to menopause-related absence, with a statement that women will experience no detriment for taking time off during this time.

Additional Information

The following is a list of organisations/websites that offer valuable help and support to women suffering the symptoms of the menopause:

Menopause Matters

www.menopausematters.co.uk/northernireland

NHS Northern Ireland

www.menopause.org.uk

www.webmd.boots.com



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16/07072