

Using this guide

The aim of this guide is to support all staff members working across the Hampshire and Isle of Wight system, including NHS organisations and primary care. We also recognise that this can be extended to include partners and family members at home too.

It is important to remember that everyone's experience of menopause is different. We experience different symptoms, have different views or philosophies around how we would manage them and different medical histories and cultural influences.

For those experiencing menopause symptoms this guide aims to help you work out what is right for you and to plan your next steps. For those supporting others, this guide aims to offer you the knowledge and understanding around menopause and where to signpost support and help.

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Introduction

Menopause is a phase of life and everyone's experience of menopause is different. While some may sail through it with barely a symptom, it isn't an easy transition for all. By increasing awareness of the menopause, encouraging open conversations, and with the right support, we can help to improve the experience at work and in personal lives too.

“ Today's workforce has nearly four million employed women aged between 45 and 55 years of age, making the menopausal age group the largest proportion of the current workforce. ”

(Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development 2022).

Research shows that the majority are unwilling to discuss menopause-related health problems with their line manager or ask for the support or adjustments they may need. Across Hampshire and Isle of Wight we want to ensure that everyone feels comfortable and empowered to have open and honest conversations about menopause, never feeling that the subject is taboo or off limits.



Our goal is for everyone to be able to talk about the menopause more openly in the workplace and we want to ensure that everyone knows what support is available.

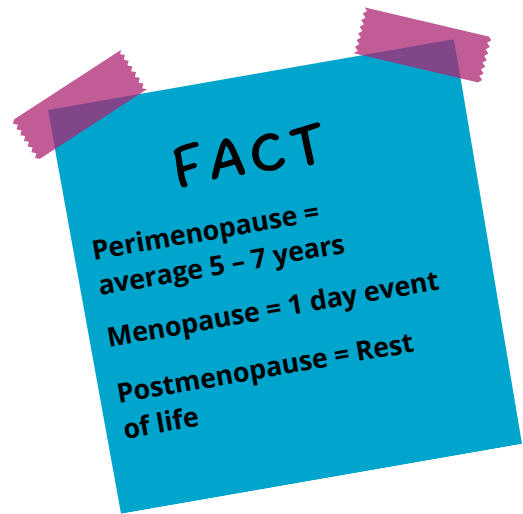
This guidance, which supports local organisational Menopause Policies, seeks to give staff members the confidence and knowledge to seek or offer support.

What is Menopause?

When we talk about menopause in this guidance, we are referring to any of the following stages.

PERIMENOPAUSE

Perimenopause is the time leading up to menopause when changes and menopausal symptoms may be experienced. This can be years before menopause, on average between 5 – 7 years.



MENOPAUSE

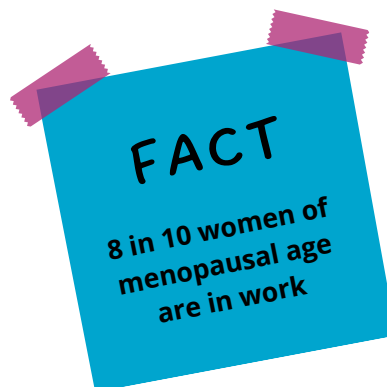
Menopause is defined as a biological stage in life that occurs when hormones change and eventually menstruation stops. Usually it is defined as having occurred when someone has not had a period for 12 consecutive months (for those reaching menopause naturally).

The average menopause age is 51 however it can be earlier naturally, or due to surgery, illness, or other reasons.



POSTMENOPAUSE

Postmenopause is the time after menopause has occurred. This starts when there has not been a period for 12 consecutive months and continues for the rest of their life.



What are menopause symptoms?

Hormone levels change throughout life e.g. during puberty, pregnancy, because of certain health conditions or treatment, gender transitioning, and as we get older. The main hormones that change during menopause are oestrogen, progesterone, and testosterone.

OESTROGEN	PROGESTERONE	TESTOSTERONE
has hundreds of functions including nourishing the tissues of the body and regulating bone turnover, as well as keeping our liver, brain, and heart healthy.	which boosts feelings of calmness, aids sleep and can help to improve mood.	which increases motivation and optimism, helps improve energy levels, supports bone health, and boosts sex drive.

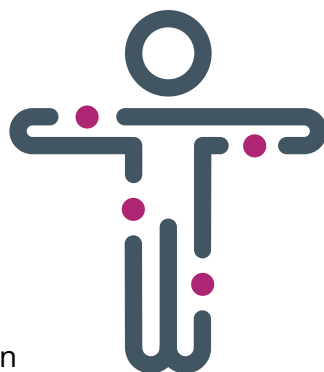
During menopause, these hormones can be out of balance. Oestrogen levels fluctuate and progesterone declines which is when someone may start noticing symptoms.

In general, hormonal changes can result in a wide range of symptoms, both physical and psychological. Three out of four women will experience symptoms of some kind when going through the menopause and these could last between four and eight years. Others may not notice any major changes. Everyone is individual and therefore your experience may be very different to colleagues or friends.

Below are some of the more common signs and symptoms of the menopause. It is very unlikely all of these symptoms will be experienced at the same time.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

- Hot flushes
- Trouble sleeping
- Fatigue
- Hair/skin changes/irritation
- Headaches or migraines
- Change in periods (irregular or heavy)
- Weight gain
- Aches and pains
- Urinary issues eg increased frequency



PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS

- Emotional/mood swings
- Brain fog
- Problems with memory recall
- Feeling low
- Lack of libido
- Tearful
- Nervousness, worry or anxiety
- Poor concentration
- Irritability



It is important to remember that your symptoms do not have to be really bad or get to the point of being unbearable before help is available for you.

Inclusivity and Menopause

It is important to have an inclusive approach to the menopause and recognise that it is not only something that happens to heteronormative women who are in their fifties.

The menopause can affect non-binary and transgender colleagues, and they, alongside those from more diverse communities and in same-sex relationships are often left out of the conversation. This exclusion can result in an inequality of access to information and support.

TRANSGENDER AND NON-BINARY COMMUNITY

The menopause is a natural stage of life which affects most women and other people who have a menstrual cycle. This can include:

- transgender people – 'trans' is an umbrella term used to describe people whose gender is not the same as the sex they were assigned at birth
- people with 'variations of sex development' (VSD) – some people might prefer to identify as intersex or use the term 'differences in sex development' (DSD)

Menopause symptoms can be experienced by transgender and non-binary colleagues due to changes in hormones which can fluctuate as treatments often stop and start again. It is important to realise that medical transition can take up to seven years. However, not every transgender or non-binary individual takes hormones, but they can still experience the menopause.

Transgender, and non-binary people face additional challenges in the form of discrimination and lack of inclusivity. Many members of the community have had poor healthcare experiences and are therefore reluctant to seek help. Menopause support must be inclusive so that everyone can be seen and heard and get the help they need. For example, a transgender man may become highly anxious as menopause symptoms may be a constant reminder that he was born in the wrong body. Additionally, if a transgender man has had surgery to remove his ovaries and uterus, they may experience a premature menopause.

EMPLOYERS SHOULD CONSIDER THAT:

- not all transgender, those with VSD or non-binary people take hormones, but those who do can experience menopause symptoms when stopping or restarting treatment
- transgender men might experience menopause symptoms if their ovaries remain and they're not given hormone therapy
- transgender men and intersex women might experience surgical menopause if their ovaries are removed
- transgender men and intersex women might not experience menopause symptoms with hormone therapy, but they may experience hormonal disruption
- transgender women and intersex women might experience some of the symptoms related to the menopause if their hormone therapy treatment is interrupted or hormone levels change

BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

Media portrayal of the menopause tends to feature white women and this plays into the false narrative that black and minority women are not affected by the menopause. Research shows that black women start the menopause up to two years earlier than white women, and experience worse symptoms for a longer time. Karen Arthur, of Menopause Whilst Black podcast adds that for black women "There's something about not showing weakness. Not slowing down or stopping. Being the shoulder that everybody cries on, and the person who fixes everything."

There are also cultural issues to be aware of, for example, in some Asian communities there is no word for menopause, and it is rarely talked about in the older generation leading to lack of knowledge and information. Therefore, it is imperative that information on the menopause and associated support is shared to all staff in a variety of forms in a sensitive manner.

The British Menopause Society have recently published '[Menopause in ethnic minority women](#)', providing more information and research in this area.

PREMATURE OVARIAN INSUFFICIENCY (POI)

Menopause before the age of 40 is called premature menopause or Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI). It can happen naturally or as a side effect of some treatments, such as radiotherapy, chemotherapy, and surgery. Those who experience premature menopause need a huge amount of support and links to some of these resources can be found at the end of this guidance.

SAME SEX RELATIONSHIPS

The menopause can be a source of friction in same sex relationships as symptoms and severity can differ. It is imperative to recognise that people's experiences differ, and to address this when offering support.

MENOPAUSAL SYMPTOMS CAN BE VERY DISTRESSING FOR AN INDIVIDUAL. ABOVE ALL ELSE, UNDERSTANDING AND SENSITIVITY IS LIKELY TO HAVE THE MOST POSITIVE IMPACT ON IMPROVING A PERSON'S CONFIDENCE AND ABILITY TO THRIVE AT WORK.

Managing menopause symptoms and long-term health

MYTHS

"HRT causes breast cancer"

"HRT increases the risk of heart attack and stroke"

"You should wait until your symptoms are unbearable before you start taking HRT"

"HRT causes weight gain"

"HRT only delays the menopause"

Just as everyone's menopause is different, so is their personal choice about how to manage symptoms and long-term health.

Benefits and risks need to be considered, alongside individual medical history. Some individuals may prefer the medical approach e.g. hormone replacement therapy (HRT), while others prefer a complementary approach, or to make lifestyle changes.

Some may not be able to have HRT due to their medical history.

[click here for the facts](#)

Medical

YOUR GP WILL BE ABLE TO DISCUSS MEDICAL OPTIONS WITH YOU, INCLUDING HRT OPTIONS.

There are many myths about HRT, so the best thing to do is research the facts on up-to-date, trusted websites before your meeting with the GP.

A little preparation will help you get the best from your appointment. You could record your symptoms, detail your menstrual cycle history, and research how you would like to manage symptoms and long-term health.

See later in this guide for tips on talking to your GP about menopause.

When considering treatment of low mood attributed to menopause, alongside HRT, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can also be beneficial and is a NICE guideline recommendation. This can also be discussed with your GP if you feel it would benefit you.



IF YOU PAY FOR PRESCRIBED HRT THREE OR MORE TIMES A YEAR, A HRT PREPAYMENT CERTIFICATE MAY SAVE YOU MONEY - FIND OUT MORE [HERE](#)

Lifestyle changes and self-care

A healthy lifestyle can have a positive impact on both menopausal symptoms and long-term health, so it is important to consider lifestyle changes during and after the menopause.

CLICK HERE



Did you know you can book a

one-to-one appointment

with one of our

MENOPAUSE ADVISERS



BE INFORMED

Take time to read up on what to expect and what will happen but most of all take control and make positive lifestyle changes. There are some useful links at the end of this guide.



COMMIT TO QUIT

Smokers tend to have an earlier menopause and smoking can also worsen hot flashes – possibly due to the effects of nicotine.



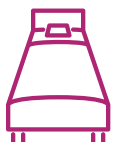
GET ACTIVE

Taking regular exercise may hold the key to keeping your weight in check, as well as regulating your mood. Activities such as regular yoga can reduce hot flashes and improve concentration, sleep, and pain levels. Finding an activity you enjoy will help make it easier to stick to.



THINK BEFORE YOU DRINK

In fact, if you can, it's a good idea to cut out alcohol completely. Alcohol is a common trigger for hot flashes and can encourage other symptoms such as headaches and mood swings. Alcohol consumption can also contribute to weight gain and being overweight can exacerbate many menopausal symptoms, as well as put you at increased risk of serious illness.



SLEEP WELL

Aim to go to bed at the same time each night; switch off the TV and all electronic devices at least an hour before bedtime. Keep your bedroom cool, use cotton sheets and wear lighter clothes in bed to prevent night sweats.

Lifestyle changes and self-care



EAT WELL

Enjoying a varied healthy diet is important for everyone and particularly during and post menopause. A healthy, well-balanced diet means eating food from a variety of food groups to get the energy and nutrients that your body needs.



CUT DOWN ON CAFFEINE

Caffeine can trigger and worsen hot flushes and night sweats, and because it is a stimulant, it can also contribute to insomnia, irritability, and mood swings. Aim to limit your intake of caffeine throughout the day and steer clear of caffeinated drinks completely in the evenings.



CONNECT WITH FRIENDS

Emotional closeness between friends boosts levels of the hormone progesterone which reduces anxiety and stress. It is good to talk about what you are experiencing and share with someone who may be going through similar.



REACH OUT FOR HELP

Don't just ignore your symptoms and hope they will go away. If you are finding it difficult to cope with any aspect of menopause speak to your GP as soon as possible. There are medical options (HRT) as well as non-medical options (CBT, acupuncture, aromatherapy, reflexology, and herbal remedies) available.



COMPLEMENTARY TREATMENTS

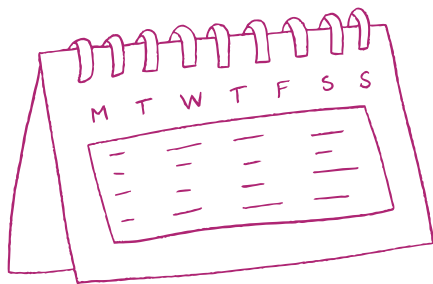
Some people choose to take herbal remedies such as black cohosh, soya-based foods, and red clover for hot flushes. There is little research or evidence to say how effective these are, and they can have side-effects or interact with other drugs. Please talk to your GP or a qualified medical herbalist before you choose these.

Ultimately, it is everyone's personal choice about how to manage menopause symptoms and long-term health.

Talking to your GP

It is always recommended that you go to your GP if you are experiencing menopausal symptoms. They can discuss options with you including hormone replacement therapy (HRT), and advice on any lifestyle changes which could help.

They should also be able to advise you on complementary treatments, including herbal remedies. Getting what is right for you from an appointment with your GP is very important, and a little preparation will go a long way in helping you make the most of it.



MAKING YOUR APPOINTMENT:

- A good place to start is to ask your local practice who is the best GP to talk to about the menopause.
- Consider asking for a longer appointment, explaining to the receptionist can help them allocate the appropriate time.

PREPARING FOR YOUR APPOINTMENT:

- Record your symptoms including frequency and duration, and detail your menstrual cycle history.
- Make notes of how your symptoms are affecting you and how you are attempting to manage them.
- Review the NICE guidelines – GP's use these to help women manage their menopause so it is a good idea to have a read through. You can find a link to these at the end of this guide.
- Research the facts on up-to-date, trusted websites, and think about ways you would like to manage not just your menopause symptoms but your long-term health. You will find some suggested resources at the end of this guide.



DURING YOUR APPOINTMENT:

- Take your partner or a close friend with you. They will know how the symptoms are affecting you and could support you at the appointment and can also find out how to continue supporting you.
- Ask if there is a menopause clinic in your area. If there is and you think this would be helpful, ask for a referral.
- Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion. If you don't feel you have received the help you need, ask to speak to someone else. Don't be put off, you know how you are feeling and how it is affecting you.



Talking to your line manager

It may feel daunting to talk to your line manager about how menopause is affecting you, however your line manager is there to help you be at your best at work and support your health and wellbeing. To help you both, it is a good idea to prepare for your conversation, this will result in a much better conversation and outcome for both of you.

Use the five steps below to help you prepare for your conversation with your line manager and get the most out of it.

REMEMBER:

Menopause can be isolating if you don't talk to someone but remember all women go through menopause at some point, so you most certainly are not alone.

1

PREPARE FOR YOUR MEETING

- Review your trust or organisation menopause policy and possible workplace adjustments (on page 16 of this guide) so you understand what support might be available to you.
- Keep a diary of your menopause symptoms and how they are affecting you at work.
- Think about what practical, reasonable adjustments might help address these symptoms at work. Try to be as flexible as possible and ideally come up with some different options. These may well only be needed for a short period of time while you work with your medical professional to alleviate your symptoms.

2

BOOK A MEETING

- This means you will have the time you need. If you are in the office, a private space to talk will allow you to get your points across without feeling pressured or overheard.

3

EXPLAIN YOUR SITUATION CLEARLY

- Talk about how menopause is affecting you at work, what you are doing to manage your menopause, and what your line manager could do to help and support you.
- Discuss what type of support you would like or is available to you, e.g. reasonable adjustments and timescales. Sometimes just knowing someone understands and is there to listen can help.

4

AGREE NEXT STEPS WITH YOUR LINE MANAGER ON WHAT YOU CAN BOTH DO

- Your line manager may need time to think about the best support available for you. Remember, this may have been on your mind for a long time but it may be the first time your line manager has heard about it. Allow them time to digest the information and seek advice if necessary.
- Talk to your line manager about whether you want the conversation to be kept confidential or if you are happy to discuss it with colleagues. It is your choice.

5

FOLLOW UP

- At the end of the meeting put a time in the diary to meet again, whether that is to agree a way forward, to monitor progress or to update each other. Menopause symptoms can change over time. Don't forget, if required you can discuss a referral to Occupational Health with your line manager.

Supporting a colleague

Menopause is a phase of life. We all need to feel comfortable talking about it and feel able to ask for help and support if needed. Simply by being willing and open to talking about it can make a big difference to someone.

It can be hard when you suspect someone is experiencing menopause symptoms, but they haven't talked to you. If you observe a colleague struggling or not seeming themselves, ask how they are or if there is anything you can help with. Knowing you care and want to support can provide great reassurance and encourage them to take the conversation further.



TIPS ON SUPPORTING A COLLEAGUE THAT YOU KNOW, OR SUSPECT MIGHT BE EXPERIENCING MENOPAUSE



DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

It is important to appreciate that everyone is different, so don't make assumptions. Whether that is about symptoms (some don't have any), how we manage them, or how much we want to talk about it.



JUST ASK "HOW ARE YOU?"

The human approach is powerful, it shows you care, understand, and want to support. A simple 'How are you?' or 'What can I do to help?' is often enough. Small gestures can make a big difference, even being able to be open about it is a relief for many.



READ UP ON THE FACTS

The detail in this guide may well be enough to give you a basic understanding of what someone might be experiencing, however you may choose to do further research, if so use only reputable organisations offering factual information.

Supporting a partner or family member

Talking openly about the menopause to your partner or someone you are close to is often the best way to support them. Finding out how they are feeling and talking honestly about how you might be feeling can make a big difference. If you are finding it difficult to start that conversation, you could consider using this guide as a conversation opener.

Simply showing you care and being patient and supportive is often the best thing that you can do. You could also use the tips below to help you be the support your partner or family member needs during their experience of menopause.

Supporting someone through menopause does not have to be complicated, simple human traits like kindness, honesty, and empathy can make a huge difference to you both during this time. You may even find that supporting each other through the experience strengthens your relationship in the long term.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

The more you know about what your partner or family member is experiencing, the better you can support them. Whilst you might not be able to understand how it feels, you can try to empathise through a deeper understanding of what it might be like.

TALK AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, LISTEN

Even if communication does not come naturally to you, giving your partner or family member a safe space to talk openly about how they are feeling will help make their experience better. You could simply try asking "What's the best thing I can do to help you get through this?" or "What is the best thing I can do right now to help you?"

BE PATIENT

This can be a really trying time and the person experiencing menopause needs to work through it in their own time and their own way. Remember that the menopause can make someone feel fragile, overwhelmed and like they hardly know themselves during these years. Your love and support are more important than ever.

OFFER TO HELP

Do what you can to keep them from feeling overwhelmed. You might not be able to take away their symptoms but there are other things you can do to help ease any pressures they might be feeling. It does not always have to be something big, - simple things can make a huge difference when you are feeling overwhelmed such as a cup of tea or running a nice relaxing bath.

SUPPORT THEIR INTERESTS

Hobbies and exercise will help improve their personal wellbeing. Encourage your partner or family member to pursue things that make them feel good. If they want to take a night class or join the gym, do what you can to make it easy for them.

SUPPORT THEIR HEALTH

Encourage them to seek help and consult their doctor about their symptoms, you could even offer to go with them. For some people, just making the appointment can be a major hurdle. Anxiety during menopause can be crippling and self-confidence can simply disappear, having someone there to support at appointments could be a huge relief.

Further Support – Internal Sources

PLEASE REFER TO YOUR ORGANISATION'S LOCAL POLICIES INCLUDING

- Menopause Policy
- Flexible Working Policy
- Leave Policy
- Health & Wellbeing Policy
- Managing Attendance Policy

WE HAVE 50 TRAINED MENOPAUSE ADVOCATES ACROSS THE SYSTEM

Advocates are trained to offer support and guidance, as well as to deliver awareness sessions to teams and line managers

To find your local Menopause Advocate please follow this [link](#)

ALL ORGANISATIONS HAVE AN EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME OFFER IN PLACE, TO SUPPORT YOU AND YOUR TEAM

Please refer to your local intranet for information on how to access your provider

Hampshire & Isle of Wight **People Portal** information can be found here:

<https://www.hiowpeople.nhs.uk/>

Are you a line manager looking for guidance?

FURTHER EXTERNAL SOURCES AND READING FOR LINE MANAGERS

HIOW Manager's Menopause Guide

CIPD Guides: Menopause at work: A guide for People Professionals

<https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/guides/menopause-people-professionals-guidance/>

CIPD Guides: Menopause at work: A guide for people managers

<https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/guides/menopause-people-manager-guidance/>

NHS England - Menopause Guidance for Line Managers

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/supporting-our-nhs-people-through-menopause-guidance-for-line-managers-and-colleagues/>

**Recording Menopause Related Sickness -
ESR Guide**

Further Support – External Sources

Menopause signs and symptoms

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/symptoms/>

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

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

Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) information and support on very early menopause

<https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk>

Information on hysterectomy

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

Henpicked Menopause Hub

<https://henpicked.net/menopause>

Balance App

<https://www.balance-menopause.com/balance-app/>

NICE guidelines on menopause treatment

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23>

HRT Prepayment Certificate Information

<https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/help-nhs-prescription-costs/nhs-hormone-replacement-therapy-prescription-prepayment-certificate-hrt-ppc>

Women's health concern

<https://www.womenshealthconcern.org/help-andadvice/factsheets/hrt/>

Find a British Menopause Society recognised specialist

[Find a BMS-recognised Menopause Specialist - British Menopause Society. \(thebms.org.uk\)](https://www.thebms.org.uk)

Find a qualified herbalist in your area

<https://nimh.org.uk/find-a-herbalist/>

LGBT+ and the Menopause

<https://menopauseexperts.com/lgbtq-menopause/>

Menopause Whilst Black: Podcast for Black Women going through the Menopause

[Menopause Whilst Black](#)



MENOPAUSE SUPPORT



VISIT THE PEOPLE PORTAL
FOR MORE DETAILS
WWW.HIOWPEOPLE.NHS.UK

*For NHS and Primary Care colleagues in
Hampshire and Isle of Wight.*



AWARENESS

Self-paced Menopause awareness sessions by MenoHealth. Access them at your convenience on the People Portal



TRAINING

Menopause awareness training for all colleagues, plus additional manager training to support your team



121 SUPPORT

One-to-one appointments with our Menopause Advisors with oversight from a Specialist Menopause Clinician



ADVOCATES

Our trained Menopause Advocates can provide support, signposting, and education to colleagues



FITNESS

Online fitness classes focused on supporting menopause