

# Health and Wellbeing

## Managing the Menopause Guidance

### 1 Background and purpose

- 1.1 One in three of the UK workforce will soon be over 50, with women over 50 the fastest growing demographic. It is therefore more important than ever for employers to have a good understanding of the menopause and how they can support colleagues through the transition.
- 1.2 The menopause is a natural phase in every woman's life, however, there is still stigma to it with many women feeling unsupported in managing their symptoms whilst remaining present and productive at work.
- 1.3 At Healthwatch Worcestershire, in line with our values, we aim to support all staff at work and to be pro-active in considering health initiatives. We recognise the positive impact of early intervention and effective prevention of health issues and of providing a supportive working environment for our staff.
- 1.4 This guidance should be read in conjunction with our Health and Wellbeing policy and, where appropriate, with our Managing Absence policy and Flexible Working policy.
- 1.5 This guidance is not contractual and does not form part of an employee's contract of employment. Healthwatch Worcestershire reserves the right to make amendments from time to time at its sole discretion.

### 2 Facts about the menopause

- 2.1 The medical definition of the menopause is when a woman has her last period. It usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, although it can occur any time up to a woman's mid-60s. A premature menopause can occur, with periods stopping before the age of 40, either naturally or as an effect of a medical condition or its treatment; this may be at a time when the woman is still hoping to conceive. On average the symptoms will last around 4 years from the last period, but 1 in 10 women experience symptoms for up to 12 years.  
  
This can often coincide with a time when women will assume additional caring responsibilities for older relatives, possibly at the same time as having teenage or adult offspring still living at home.
- 2.2 The peri-menopause is the phase leading up to the menopause when hormone balance starts to change. For some women this will be as early as their 20s and for others it will be as late as their 40s.
- 2.3 Between one-third to two-thirds of women experience fluctuating physical and/or psychological symptoms during the menopause. These are associated with a decrease in the body's production of the hormone oestrogen.

## 2.4 Symptoms may include:

- Irregular and heavy periods, menorrhagia, “flooding”
- hot flushes
- night sweats
- sleep disruption, fatigue
- headaches
- difficulty concentrating
- mood disturbances
- palpitations (heartbeat that becomes more noticeable)
- itchy skin
- recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs), including cystitis
- anxiety and depression

## 2.5 Further, the impact on women can be:

- embarrassment and distress
- diminished confidence
- increased stress

## 3. Menopause and the law

3.1 Managers will wish to be mindful that failing to support an individual with severe menopause symptoms may amount to discrimination under the Equality Act 2010, based on gender and/or age. Further, where symptoms and their consequences have a substantial adverse effect on normal day-to-day activity this may meet the legal definition of a disability under the act.

3.2 Healthwatch Worcestershire will ensure that its managers have an awareness of menopause and feel confident to support an individual who is experiencing problems.

## 4. The manager’s role

4.1 Manager’s will wish to ensure that women feel comfortable to discuss any health problems and any difficulties they are experiencing inside and outside work. This may be achieved by:

- Regular, informal conversations (1-to-1s/catch-ups) between managers and staff
- Managers being ready to listen and facilitate open discussion about troublesome symptoms and how they might be negated or minimised
- Risk assessment considering the specific role and duties
- A referral to Occupational Health
- Regular review, understanding that symptoms may fluctuate over time

4.2 Managers will recognise the benefits of supporting individuals to stay at work (rather than taking sickness absence) and to continue to be fully engaged in their work. They will try to avoid making assumptions or being prescriptive.

## **5. Adjustments and support**

5.1 Healthwatch Worcestershire recognise that some women may feel awkward talking to a male line manager and Jane Stanley has agreed to be the female lead/point of contact for such circumstances. Individuals may request to speak to her about any gender-specific issues as applicable. This may include follow-up to routine absence reporting or in facilitating an effective return to work, or for support in seeking reasonable adjustments.

5.2 Healthwatch Worcestershire will ensure that staff have ready access to washrooms, toilets, a source of cold drinking water and emergency hygiene products.

5.3 Individuals should feel able to request reasonable work adjustments which managers will reasonably consider. These might include:

- review of workplace temperature and ventilation
- an electric desk fan
- a move to a desk nearer to a window or away from a source of heat
- flexible breaks/access to a quiet space (for example to manage a hot flush)
- a flexible working pattern, including ad hoc working from home
- some flexibility in dress code
- flexibility with time off for medical appointments
- encouragement or training to use practical aids via technology for assisting any temporary memory issues

## **6 Confidentiality**

6.1 All health issues will be conducted with respect for confidentiality and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 (as amended).

## **7 Audit and Review**

7.1 A review of this guidance will take place annually unless legal, contractual, specific business requirements, operational changes or events necessitate an earlier review.

7.2 This guidance will be subject to Equality Impact Assessment under the Public Sector Equality Duty Act 2010.