

SALISBURY NHS FOUNDATION TRUST Menopause Policy and Procedure

1. Quick Reference Guide

- This policy applies to all employees engaged on a contract of employment including fixed- term contracts.
- Definitions
- Menopause symptoms
- Guidance for employees experiencing menopause
- Guidance for People Managers in how to support a colleague experiencing menopause

2. Policy Introduction and Purpose

- Our ability to deliver an outstanding patient experience every time is reliant on creating an environment that enables you to work to the best of your ability. This includes maintaining a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for colleagues experiencing menopause.
- We believe that it is critical that all our people are treated with dignity and respect, and all colleagues experiencing menopause can be confident that they will be listened to, understood and supported.
- Colleagues experiencing menopause sometimes require accommodations, and guidance is provided for them and their managers in the procedure section of this document.

Version Information			
Version no	Updated by	Date	Description of Changes
2.0	Senior Business Partner Employee Relations	January 2023	New Policy and Procedure

Eligibility

This policy and procedure apply to all employees engaged on a contract of employment including fixed-term contracts and NHS employees seconded into the Trust. In the case of agency workers and volunteer colleagues due regard should be given to the procedures and contracts specific to their engagement with the Trust, while respecting confidentiality and ensuring the values described in this policy are maintained regardless of employment type.

4. Scope

This policy is intended to support colleagues who are experiencing symptoms associated with the perimenopause and the menopause, including those symptoms which continue post menopause. The term ‘menopause’ is used throughout this policy to encompass all of these stages.

This policy may also be used to support colleagues impacted by a family member’s menopause.

Throughout the policy, gender neutral terms are used to describe colleagues who may experience the menopause. It is recognised that not everyone experiencing the menopause will identify or express themselves as a woman. People who are non-binary, trans or intersex, and who may not identify as a woman, may also experience menopausal symptoms. This policy therefore applies to anyone experiencing the menopause, regardless of their gender expression or identity.

5. Definitions

Menopause is defined as having occurred when someone has not had a period for twelve consecutive months (for people reaching menopause naturally and not, for example, using hormonal contraception). However, some people can also have menopause induced as a result of surgery or medical treatments, such as chemotherapy or pelvic radiation therapy. Natural menopause occurs on average around 51, although premature menopause can occur at almost any age.

Perimenopause is the transition phase (also referred to as menopause transition) which may last for several years before menopause. During this time hormone levels fluctuate and the menstrual cycle becomes erratic or irregular. This phase can last from a few months to many years. The average length of this stage is 4 years. Some people experience no symptoms and some people are severely affected.

Post menopause is the time after menopause when ovulation no longer occurs. Symptoms experienced in perimenopause can continue into this stage or may start at this point if menopause has been induced.

6. Menopause Symptoms

Research suggests around 75% of people going through menopause will experience some level of symptoms, with as many 10% having symptoms so severe they feel they have to leave the workforce.

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically, including but not limited to:

- mood changes
- memory and concentration loss
- headaches
- panic attacks
- heavy or light periods
- no or infrequent periods
- anxiety
- loss of confidence
- sleep difficulties
- hot flushes or excessive sweating
- joint and muscle stiffness
- out of character behaviour, for example uncharacteristically emotional

Some colleagues may not initially realise that they are experiencing the menopause and may try to ignore, or even misdiagnose their own symptoms. If you have any concerns about changes to your health or wellbeing, seek medical advice from your GP.

7. Policy

Support for colleagues experiencing menopause

Menopause is a natural stage in the fertility cycle and while not everyone will experience symptoms, offering support to those who do should help improve their experience at work. Recognising the impact of symptoms and identifying accommodations to reduce that impact should enable colleagues to continue to contribute as effectively as possible.

Within healthcare a significant proportion of colleagues are within the age range 40-60 when symptoms are most likely to occur and therefore providing this type of support is likely to have a positive impact on the entire workforce.

Some people may not feel comfortable discussing menopause related health problems, and the potential impact these can have on their work, with their managers. Managers should encourage colleagues to feel menopause is not an issue that needs to be hidden; they should be assured of being able to talk about it openly without any hesitancy or fear of embarrassment. There is no requirement for staff to disclose that they are experiencing the menopause, however if they do, they should be confident that they will be listened to, understood and supported.

Discussions with line managers will be handled sensitively and confidentially, with advice from Occupational Health being available as appropriate. Information should only be shared with Occupational Health when consent has been provided by the staff member concerned.

It is important for managers to recognise that other people can be indirectly affected by the menopause, for example if a person's partner is experiencing insomnia and night sweats, they may also experience disrupted sleep and fatigue. If a team member's partner experiences significant physical or psychological symptoms from menopause the team member may be concerned for their partner's wellbeing and feel increased levels of stress. **In some cases, people can experience relationship problems or difficulties at home during this time and may need time off which they should discuss with their manager who will be understanding and supportive of team members in these circumstances.**

In some case a manager may feel menopause is impacting a team member, even though they have not raised the subject themselves. In this case the manager should raise their concerns with the team member confidentially and with empathy.

7.1 Colleagues experiencing the menopause

Seeking medical advice

If you suspect you may be experiencing the menopause you should consider seeking medical advice from your GP, particularly if your symptoms are causing you discomfort or you are under 40. Some GP practices have a doctor with specific expertise in menopause.

Before attending the appointment list your symptoms (mental and physical) and any changes you have noticed. It is also useful to make a note of any treatment preferences you have and questions about treatment. If necessary ask someone to accompany you to help you focus on the issues you need to raise.

Your GP can discuss the effects and effectiveness of treatments, including non-medical options. They may also discuss lifestyle and how symptoms can be managed through changes that may help improve your longer-term health.

It should not be necessary for most people to have to 'put up with' symptoms, although sometimes your GP won't be able to prescribe certain medication (such as Hormone Replacement Therapy) due to other medical conditions.

Disclosing at work

You do not have to disclose you are experiencing the menopause. If you would like to disclose and discuss what support might be available to you, you can arrange to speak to your line manager in the first instance. If you feel unable to speak to your line manager, you can self-refer to colleagues from Occupational Health.

Ask for a discussion in a location that offers you a level of privacy that you are comfortable with and ensure that enough time is allocated for you to explain your situation.

You may wish to write down any issues you want to raise beforehand. If you do, bring this to the meeting along with any thoughts or suggestions about potential workplace adjustments from your discussion with your GP and/or your own research before the discussion.

If necessary ask for someone to accompany you to help you focus on the issues you need to raise and explain this to your line manager beforehand.

If you would prefer to speak to someone from the Occupational Health & Wellbeing service in the first instance, you can contact them to arrange a 'self-referral' appointment. If you require **adjustments** to help you improve your experience at work then the Occupational Health service will most likely have to liaise with your line manager to consider this and a management referral may ultimately be required or suggested.

With your consent, whoever you speak to should make a record of the conversation, noting any potential issues or adjustments that you may discuss. The information you share will be strictly confidential and not shared beyond your line manager or the relevant staff within Occupational Health & Wellbeing.

7.2 Confidential Advice and Support

The following confidential support is available to colleagues experiencing menopause and those impacted by menopause.

Counselling

This service is provided by a part time counsellor based in the Occupational Health department. The counsellor may be contacted directly through Occupational Health reception 5639 or by mobile on 07548 537996. There is a voicemail service available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Please be aware this service is not a 24/7 service and your call will be responded to as soon as possible.

Occupational Health Service

All employees have a right to self-refer to occupational health in confidence if their health is affected. Call on extension 2235 or email sft.occupationalhealth@nhs.net.

Clinical Psychology

Staff who are experiencing low mood, anxiety or difficult emotions around a work issue, or that are affecting their ability to work, can self-refer to Clinical Psychology. Sessions are completely confidential and aimed at providing coping strategies for a variety of different issues. Email shc-tr.clinicalpsychology@nhs.net to self-refer.

Chaplaincy

Our Chaplaincy team is available to support employees, as well as patients and visitors. The chaplains provide religious, spiritual and pastoral care to anyone and everyone in the hospital who might need it. Whatever your faith, or if you have none, chaplains can be approached to listen and to offer support in any situation, whether personal or work related. Find them in the Chapel, (on Level 3, next to the Pharmacy); or call and leave a message on ext. 4271; or call Switchboard and ask them to bleep the duty chaplain.

Trade Unions

The Trust recognises the important role Trade Unions play in addressing concerns at work. Staff who are members are encouraged to approach their Trade Union Representative regarding unresolved concerns. The Trust will work in conjunction with the Trade Unions in addressing these concerns.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager or your People Partner

Our Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Manager or your People Partner can signpost you to the most appropriate source of advice including Menopause Champions.

8 Guidance for People Managers

8.1 Benefits

Your role is integral in helping us achieve our ambition to make our organisation a truly outstanding place to work. For this to happen we know that all our people need to feel valued and respected. The benefits of this are:

- promoting the Trust as an outstanding organisation and place to work significantly improves our ability to retain people in a competitive employment market including those with particular skills and valued experience
- a more inclusive and understanding workforce who will deliver high-quality work
- a reduction in costs associated high levels of absence, lost productivity, increased turnover, and recruitment
- increased workforce efficiency and effectiveness reducing cost and increasing service for the Trust

8.2 Your Responsibilities as a Manager supporting a colleague experiencing menopause

A team member who feels supported by their manager will have a better sense of wellbeing in the workplace. This contributes to an inclusive and positive experience for the team member and enhances the workplace culture and environment.

Meeting with your team member

Your team member may request a meeting to discuss their menopause symptoms, or they may not be specific about the topic to be discussed. Ensure any meetings are in a location which provides privacy and plan plenty of time.

Your team member may ask another workplace colleague or trade union representative to attend the meeting with them for support.

Ensure you document any actions agreed during the meeting(s) and make sure any notes you take during meetings are kept confidential. You should ask your team member if they are happy for you to share notes from the meeting before passing any information to Occupational Health.

In some cases your team member may have felt more comfortable approaching Occupational Health directly.

Considering workplace adjustments

The following are examples of what you might do to support a team member experiencing menopausal symptoms. You should not automatically make these adjustments as each person is different and experiences their menopause differently. Similarly, this list is not exhaustive and other adjustments might be considered.

What is reasonable in the circumstances for your team member should be discussed and agreed between you and them, with advice from Occupational Health & Wellbeing as necessary. Plan regular updates to ensure adjustments are still appropriate as symptoms are likely to vary over time. Where a member of staff is unfit for work due to menopausal symptoms and therefore absent, with their consent this will be recorded as such, and managers will consider this to be an ongoing condition requiring consideration of reasonable adjustments and tolerance in absence management triggers. Managers may also need to consider the impact of the menopause in decisions regarding formal disciplinary or performance management procedures.

SYMPTOM	ADJUSTMENTS TO CONSIDER
Hot flushes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A degree of temperature control, such as a desk fan or moving a person to a cooler area of the office or away from a heat source • Easier access to cool drinking water • Agree the need to sometimes move away from the work area to manage a hot flush, allowing a person to go to the coolest point (which may be outside), the toilet or quiet room as necessary • Ensure that meeting rooms are not occupied beyond the suggested capacity and that 'time out' of a meeting may be required.
Heavy/erratic periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier access to washroom facilities both when office based and when off site on visits / meetings/ inspections. This may mean preparation in advance to check available facilities • Working from home when leaving the house and travelling is not feasible due to heavy periods
Headaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide quiet areas and touchdown areas as appropriate • Provide noise reducing headphones to wear in open offices • Allow time away from tasks to take medication
Difficulty sleeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible working/agile working/change of work
Low mood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer a 'buddy' or someone else to talk to • Allow some time for the person to refocus on their work • Encourage your team member to seek support from their GP/Occupational Health team
Loss of confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow focussed time to address confidence in regular 1:1's Allocate protected time to catch up with work
Poor Concentration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help to establish if there is a pattern and consider adjustments if concentration is better or worse at certain times of the day • Review workload • Support with task planning, and memory aides • Offer quiet space and minimise disruptions • Provide noise reducing headphones
Anxiety and panic attacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage your team member to seek support from their GP / Occupational Health team • Identify a quiet room or space to practice relaxation techniques or mindfulness • Offer some time out for a short walk or to speak to a trusted colleague who can help them to manage the situation in the moment

Creating a positive and supportive environment

Some colleagues won't want to discuss their menopause symptoms with anyone, and you should always respect confidentiality. However, you can help create a positive and open environment and reduce stigma by encouraging awareness around menopause and the impact symptoms can have on many people going through this stage of their lives.

Many of the workplace adjustments suggested can have a positive impact on performance for reasons other than managing menopause symptoms and a degree of flexibility around accommodations will ensure your team members are more likely to ask for support when they need it.

8 Monitoring Compliance and Effectiveness of this Policy

This will be monitored by the OD& People Directorate. Our people managers and our people are responsible for the implementation of this policy and procedure.

9 Equality Impact Assessment

This document has been assessed against the Trust's Equality Impact Assessment Tool which was presented to the ratifying committee.

Post Holder /Author Responsible for Policy:	Head of Employee Relations and Policy
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Approved By:	
Ratified by:	
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