



Highlands

School & Sixth Form

Dare to
flourish

Menopause policy

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Section 1

1.1 Introduction

Menopause is a normal part of many women's life. This policy recognises that the menopause is an equality and occupational health and safety issue and that women may need appropriate flexibility, support and adjustments during the time of change before, during and after the menopause. Highlands School has a positive attitude towards the menopause in all its stages (peri, menopause and post) and will treat all individuals with dignity and respect during this time and ensure that the workplace is supportive of women during this time. Women do not need a diagnosis or a medical note to access this support and the support will be in place for as long as they have symptoms. Highlands School is committed to ensuring that women feel confident in discussing menopausal symptoms openly, without embarrassment, and are able to ask for support and adjustments in order to continue to work safely in the organisation.

It should be noted that people from the non-binary, transgender and intersex communities may also experience menopausal symptoms. Due to a variety of factors, the experience of the menopause may be different for those among these communities. Although the policy refers to women, please consider that 'people who menstruate' also require consideration.

Experiences and perceptions of the menopause may also differ in relation to disability, age, race, religion, sexual orientation or marital/civil partnership status. It is important to recognise that for many reasons, people's individual experiences of the menopause may differ greatly. Menopause can also affect partners and families too. For this reason, the menopause at work is an issue for all people at work, not just women.

1.2 Vision statement and school values

Highlands School is a community school where every student and colleague is nurtured to be the very best they can be. Our values and ethos are tangible from the moment you enter the school, and all members of the school community share our DARE values; determination, aspiration, respect and equality. Being part of the Highlands community is based on a shared understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion. We are a very diverse community and our diversity is our strength. Every member of our community is included, heard and valued.

We see issues of race, age, gender, sexuality and disability as being equally important, and inter-related. Equal opportunities means monitoring and evaluating structures within organisations so that all students and staff have equal access and that all employees receive equal consideration. The provision of equal opportunities means that an awareness of these differences is needed by the school in order to ensure that all opportunities are made available and attractive to all staff and students.

Community education is very important to us. We believe that our school is here to serve and support the local community, and that the children of our community deserve the very best. We are committed to being a forward thinking employer with established best practice in ethical recruitment, flexible working and gender equality. Our professional development celebrates diversity in all its forms and embodies British Values. We are a reflective organisation and we are always reviewing our policies and processes to ensure they reflect our school ethos and strong equalities focus.

1.3 Policy statement

This policy sets out the guidelines for employees on providing the right support to manage menopausal symptoms at work. It is estimated that between 75% and 80% of menopausal women are in work in the UK. It is therefore imperative that workplaces have a workable, informative and robust policy in place that is fully consistent with UK legislation.

The menopause is a normal part of most women's life, and marks the end of her reproductive cycle. For many reasons, it may not be an easy time in a woman's life and so it is imperative that workers who require additional support during this time are treated with understanding, dignity and respect. The policy acknowledges that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution to the menopause and so it is intended as a support guide for all workers. All stakeholders agree to work proactively to make adjustments where necessary to support women experiencing the menopause and to ensure the workplace does not make their symptoms worse.

Exclusionary or discriminatory practices will not be tolerated.

1.4 Legal requirements

Highlands School undertakes to comply with its legal obligations as set out below:

- The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all workers. Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers are required to undertake general risk assessments which should include specific risks to menopausal women.
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, GB Regulations 4;
- The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992;
- Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) introduced by the Equality Act 2010 (Eng, Scotland and Wales);
- The Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination against people on the grounds of certain 'protected characteristics' including sex, age and disability. Conditions linked to the menopause may meet the definition of an 'impairment' under the Equality Act and require reasonable adjustments. Please see our school equality policy for details of this. If someone is found not to be following this policy then they will be in breach of our equalities policy.

1.5 Aims and objectives

The Governing Body and school, through this menopause policy aim to:

- educate and inform managers about the potential symptoms of the menopause, and how they can support women at work;
- understand the menopause and related issues, and how they can affect staff;
- raise a wider awareness and understanding among the workforce;
- outline support and reasonable adjustments that are available;
- create an environment where women feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for reasonable adjustments and additional support at work.

1.6 Definitions

Perimenopause

The perimenopause is the period in a woman's life when she starts to experience hormonal fluctuations and changes to her periods. The average time for a woman to be perimenopausal is between four and five years. During this time, periods may become increasingly heavy and irregular, meaning it is vitally important for a woman experiencing symptoms to be close to toilets and shower facilities. For some women, the symptoms during this time can be worse than the actual menopause.

Menopause

A woman is described as being menopausal when they have gone 12 months without a period and when her ovaries are no longer responsive. The average age for a woman to reach the menopause in the UK is 51. American evidence suggests that this is different for Asian and black women. An Asian woman may start her menopause later and a black woman slightly earlier. To date, there is no UK evidence on this issue.

Post-menopausal

This is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months. The average time for women experiencing symptoms of the menopause is five years, but many women experience symptoms for up to ten years and 3% of women will experience symptoms for the rest of their lives. Post-menopausal women have an increased risk of heart disease, diabetes and osteoporosis and managers should be aware of this.

Section 2

2.1 Workplace support

This policy recognises that there are many workplace factors which can make working life more difficult for women experiencing the menopause and which may make symptoms worse. School and college leaders should take into consideration the concerns listed in Appendix 1.

2.2 Line Managers

It is recognised that the menopause is a very personal experience and different adjustments and levels of support may be needed for different individuals. Line managers should familiarise themselves with the menopause policy and seek to provide appropriate support and adjustments when needed to help women deal with issues arising from the menopause. 'Management advice' is provided as an Appendix 1 to this policy.

2.3 Employees

All staff are responsible for taking responsibility for looking after their health. This includes being open and honest in conversations with HR and occupational health; contributing to a respectful and healthy working environment; being willing to help and support their colleagues; accepting and supporting any necessary adjustments their colleagues request or are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.

It is also recognised that workplace demands can complicate this. Employees can expect such things as:

- access to toilets;
- access to drinking water;
- access to the employee wellbeing service;
- risk assessments, carried out by a suitable person; and
- regulated temperatures

Depending on what symptoms are presenting employees can also expect the following. This can include but is not limited to:

- Informed managers who are prepared to discuss issues arising from the menopause in a sensitive manner
- A shared knowledge base about the menopause as part of whole staff equalities training
- On call support should a woman need to use the toilet whilst she is teaching
- Additional breaks from screen based work
- Implementation of the HSE management standards
- Readily available sanitary products
- Access to a menopause support and action group
- Reasonable adjustments to workload/ sickness absence if required

Appendices

Appendix 1: Management guidance for informal discussions

Managers should familiarise themselves with the menopause before conducting a meeting with a member of staff to discuss their situation. The menopause is a natural part of ageing which usually occurs between 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. A woman is officially described as postmenopausal when her ovaries are no longer working and when she has not had a period for 12 months.

The perimenopause is the period of hormonal change leading up to the menopause. This is the time when many women start to experience symptoms. The perimenopause can often last for four to five years, although for some women it may continue for many more years, or for others last just a few months. In general, periods usually start to become less frequent over this time. Sometimes menstrual cycles become shorter, periods may become heavier or lighter, or women may notice that the odd period is missed until eventually they stop altogether. Some women report that during the perimenopause, they experience worse symptoms than the menopause.

Some women experience sudden menopause after surgery, chemotherapy or radiotherapy. It is estimated that around one in every 100 women will experience a premature menopause (before the age of 40). Menopause affects every woman differently and so there is no 'one-size fits-all' solution to it. Some women experience few symptoms while others experience such severe symptoms that it impacts negatively on both their home and working lives.

Signs and symptoms of the menopause

The following is merely a guide to some of the signs and symptoms women may experience as part of the menopause. Some women may suffer with conditions that are exacerbated by the menopause, such as osteoarthritis and migraine. Signs and symptoms may include:

Vasomotor symptoms

- *Hot flushes and night sweats
- *Psychological effects of hormone changes
- *Low mood/mood swings
- *Poor memory and concentration
- *Insomnia
- *Loss of libido

*Anxiety/panic attacks

Physical Symptoms

*Headaches

*Fatigue

*Joint aches and pains

*Palpitations

*Formication (creeping skin)

*Insomnia

Sexual Symptoms

*Reduced sex drive

*Painful sex/*vaginal dryness

*Urinary tract infections

*Vaginal irritation

Consequences of oestrogen deficiency

*Obesity, diabetes

*Heart disease

*Osteoporosis/chronic arthritis

*Dementia and cognitive decline

*Cancer

N.B. This is not an exhaustive list.

Many women may also find that their symptoms are connected. For example, sleep disturbance, which is really common during the menopause, may lead to a whole plethora of other serious conditions including 'brain fog'.

The length of time that women experience symptoms of the menopause can vary between women. Again, there is no one answer for all. Symptoms can begin months or years before a woman's periods stop. The perimenopause is usually expected to last around four or five years, but it can be much shorter or longer. During this time, many women begin to experience painful, intermittent and heavy periods. As a teacher, it is therefore important to raise this issue with management if adjustments need to be put in place, such as having access to a toilet and shower facilities.

According to the NHS, on average, a woman continues to experience symptoms for around four years after their last period, but around 10% of women continue to experience symptoms for up to 12 years after their last period and 3% will suffer for the rest of their lives. With teachers remaining in the classroom well into

their sixties, it is imperative that caseworkers are aware of this and are not afraid to raise it as an issue with women members seeking help and support for other, seemingly unrelated, concerns.

It is also important to recognise that beyond the menopause, post menopausal women can be at increased risk of certain conditions due to a decrease in hormones. These include osteoporosis and heart disease. The British Menopause Society (2016) estimated that 50% of women aged between 45 and 65 who had experienced the menopause in the previous ten years had NOT consulted a healthcare professional about their menopausal symptoms.

This was despite:

- 42% of women feeling that their symptoms were worse or much worse than they expected;
- 50% of women believed the menopause had impacted on their home life; and
- More than a third believed the menopause had impacted on their work life.

Many workplace factors can make working life more difficult for women experiencing the menopause, which may make symptoms worse. School and college leaders should take into consideration the concerns listed below.

These can include:

- lack of suitable gender sensitive 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;
- toilet/washing facilities;
- lack of control of temperature/ light;
- lack of appropriate uniforms or personal protective equipment (PPE in science department);
- inflexible working time rules/break times;
- inflexible policies which penalise women because of their symptoms;
- negative attitudes;
- excessive workloads;
- workplace stress;
- unsympathetic line management/colleagues; and
- bullying and harassment.

Line managers

It is recognised that the menopause is a very personal experience and different adjustments and levels of support may be needed for different individuals. Line managers should seek to provide appropriate support and adjustments when needed to help women deal with issues arising from the menopause.

Should an employee request a meeting to discuss concerns of the menopause, it is recommended that line managers adhere to the following:

- Arrange a meeting at a convenient time for both parties;
- Allow the employee to be accompanied if they want it. This can be a trade union representative or a colleague;
- Choose a venue that provides privacy and is unlikely to be disturbed;
- Allow adequate time to talk;
- Encourage the employee to be open and honest. It is difficult to help when you haven't got the full picture;

- If the employee wishes to speak to another manager, this should be allowed;
- Keep a note of all discussions and agree outcomes and next steps;
- Agree to a follow-up meeting to review the situation.