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About
menopause

Reinventing healthcare for every body

So, what exactly is menopause?

Medically speaking, menopause is diagnosed 12 months after someone stops experiencing their period - if they are over the age of 45 and not using hormonal contraception. The average age of menopause in the UK is 51.[1]

People often use the terms 'menopause' and 'perimenopause' interchangeably however, perimenopause usually refers to the time before someone experiences menopause, and 'post-menopause' refers to the stage after someone has experienced menopause.

1 in 100 people (about 1% of all cases) might experience menopause before 40, which is called premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency (POI). It could happen naturally or be caused by an underlying health condition or a medical procedure such as treatment for cancer or removal of the ovaries or uterus.[2]

What are the symptoms of menopause?

Whilst menopause is a natural part of life, there is still very little conversation about the impact it can have. Around 30-60% of people experience a combination of physical and psychological symptoms, usually starting during the perimenopausal period.[3] Most of these symptoms are linked to decreasing levels of the hormone oestrogen.[1]

- Irregular or heavier periods.
- Hot flushes, suddenly feeling hot or cold on the face, neck and chest which can make someone dizzy, tired and irritable.
- Night sweats, hot flushes that happen during the night.
- Palpitations (heartbeat suddenly becoming more noticeable).
- Trouble sleeping.
- Cognitive changes like difficulty concentrating, difficulty with memory and brain fog.
- Mood changes like low mood, anxiety, mood swings and low self-esteem.
- Headaches and migraines.
- Skin changes, including dry and itchy skin.
- Vaginal dryness and pain, itching or discomfort during sex.
- Low sex drive.
- Urinary incontinence.
- Recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs).
- Muscle aches and joint pains.

Low oestrogen can also increase the risk of long term health risks such as cardiovascular conditions and osteoporosis, a condition where bones become weak and brittle, increasing the risk of fractures.[1]

Meet the researcher

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Ruby is a scientific researcher specialising in reproductive science and women's health, with a BSc in Biomedical Science from the University of Strathclyde and an MSc in Reproductive Science and Women's Health from UCL— where she received the Anne McLaren Award for academic excellence, featuring on the Dean's list of outstanding students. Ruby's research includes inequalities and diversity in reproductive health, menopause and sports gynaecology.

Did you know?

Hot flushes affect 3 in every 4 menopausal women[3]

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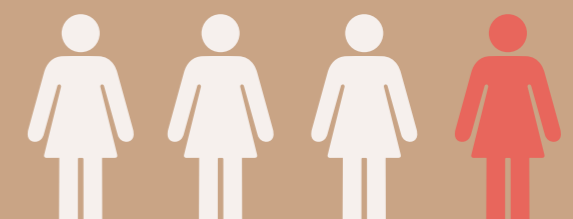
Experience of menopause is diverse

When thinking about menopause, we often picture a singular journey.

Whilst it's vital to provide support to cis-women going through menopause, it is also important to consider the diverse experiences of all menopausal people in the workplace.

Ethnic diversity in menopause experience

Research has shown that there may be a difference in both the way people of different ethnicities experience menopause as well as how long the perimenopausal period lasts.[5] Black women in particular have shown to not only be more likely to experience vasomotor

symptoms (such as hot flushes and night sweats) but to also classify these symptoms as more bothersome and occuring more often than white women.[6]

To maintain a diverse workforce, employers need to be cognisant of these differences in menopause experience, particularly as Black employees will be affected by structural racism and discrimination both in the workplace and within the healthcare system. Experiencing both a lower standard of care and bothersome symptoms over a longer period of time can lead to absenteeism, presenteeism and more time off of work.

Early and Premature menopause

There are cases where people may go through menopause earlier than the average age. This can be classed as either early menopause

(before the age of 45) or premature menopause (before the age of 40). It can happen due to medical treatment (such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy to the pelvis) or it can be caused by a condition called Premature ovarian insufficiency, also known as POI (a reproductive health condition where the ovaries do not function properly).

Experiencing menopause at a younger age can come with different challenges. For example, people with POI may experience infertility and will therefore not have been able to achieve their family forming goals. Those going through menopause as a result of medial treatment may face discrimination in the workplace or not even be aware that the symptoms they're experiencing are due to menopause so will potentially go through their life (and career) with debillitating, unmanaged symptoms.

Transgender, non-binary and gender diverse people

Transgender, intersex and some non-binary people may also experience menopause. This can either be in someone who is AFAB (assigned female at birth) and has chosen not to medically/surgically transition but also gender diverse people who take hormones. Coming off these hormones may be necessary to undergo medical procedures and can lead to menopausal symptoms.

People who are gender diverse may experience discrimination in the workplace or feel their symptoms are not taken seriously, particularly those who have not disclosed their trans status. There is often a lack of representative, reputable resources available to gender diverse people about menopause. If you want to achieve an inclusive culture in your organisation, it's crucial to address this.

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Why is menopause a workplace issue?

Reproductive health is often seen as a taboo topic, so it is not surprising that menopause is often not a topic discussed in the workplace - despite half of the UK workforce comprising women.

1. Building an age and gender diverse workplace

Currently, there are around 8 in 10 menopausal people in the UK workforce yet 1 million women exiting the worforce due to menopausal symptoms.[11]

The menopausal transition often coincides with the age someone is likely to be entering leadership positions, and unfortunately, women only hold around 25% of C-suite positions.[12] To finally see gender equality in the boardroom, it's vital for employers to take action to support employees through their transition to menopause.

2. Supporting workforce performance and engagement

There are more than 30 physical and psychological conditions associated with the menopause transition. Employers need to acknowledge that their toll can negatively affect work performance, especially if the workplace is not supportive.

Menopausal symptoms can make it difficult to concentrate, people can experience more stress and feel less patient with clients and colleagues,[13] with some symptoms such as hot flushes and night sweats leading to up to 60% more absenteeism.[14]

3. Supporting workforce retention

A lack of a supportive working environment can reduce job satisfaction and increase absenteeism and the desire to leave work altogether.[17] Almost a million women have left their jobs due to menopausal symptoms and the lack of workplace support to help them cope.[18] This loss of nurtured and experienced employees costs companies in talent and productivity.

This is why a forward-thinking employer should consider taking steps towards better support systems for menopausal people in the workplace. Making menopause awareness and support an organisational goal will help more people discuss their issues with managers, foster an inclusive and supportive environment, and retain experienced talent.

Did you know?

1 in 4 women experience severe menopause symptoms.[11] A 2019 UK survey found nearly one third of respondents took sick leave to manage their symptoms with only a quarter of them feeling able to tell their manager the real reason for their absence.[13]

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Understand what support is needed

Here are our 5 top tips to help you create a workforce environment where menopause is no longer part of a hushed conversation but discussed respectfully and openly.

1. Education is the first step!

During the menopausal transition, it often feels like you no longer understand what is happening to your body. By educating all employees about menopause, you will provide your staff with the tools to be able to advocate for not only their own health, but the health of others around them.

2. Create channels for support (and make sure your staff know how to access them)

Even knowing where to turn for support can be difficult in the workplace. So, it's important to signpost all available support and even go one step further by providing training and development for members of staff. This way there is a designated point of contact to go to for advice and support.

3. Make physical changes to your workplace or help your employees at home

Ensure that everyone has access to onsite facilities which may help alleviate symptom burden during the working day. Providing things like a desk fan, access to temperature control, quiet spaces or allowing employees to work from home when they choose, can make a huge difference.

4. Partner with Hertility, a specialised provider who can deliver comprehensive menopause care

For some, menopause can be relatively uneventful but for others, this can be an extremely turbulent time. Part of being an inclusive employer is recognising that each individual may need different levels of support. This can be in the form of counselling, nutritional support, HRT adjustment or hormone testing. Hertility is unique in that it is the only reproductive health provider who is able to provide comprehensive care, from testing to treatment and is able to support individuals and businesses through care plans, education seminars & training and policy support.

5. Formalise this into an inclusive menopause policy

A comprehensive menopause policy shows that your company recognises and respects the needs of women going through menopause. By providing support and resources for women experiencing menopause, you can help them to thrive in their careers and be a supportive employer. This can also strengthen your DE&I policy, improving your reputation as an inclusive workplace.

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What you can do as an employer

In fact it's not what you can do but what you must do. Recent laws have found that menopausal people may be classed as disabled by the Equality Act. This means that as an employer, you have a duty to provide adequate support for menopausal people in the workplace.

Here are some examples of workplace adjustments that can support all menopausal people in their transition:

- Address your use of gendered language in the workplace.
- Educate all employees on the diverse experiences of menopause
- Be inclusive of transgender, non-binary and gender diverse people in your workplace support materials.
- Make physical adjustments e.g. change of uniform, flexible working, cold water, ventilation and access to temperature adjustment.
- Partner with a provider who can offer inclusive resources and support for all menopausal people.

How can Hertility help you?

The workplace wasn't designed with women in mind, we're here to change that. In fact, it's estimated that over 1 million women are currently leaving the workplace due to menopause. So, we're here to support employers to attract and retain a diverse, thriving and innovating workforce with our menopause offering - comprising of expert-led CPD-accredited educational workshops, comprehensive at-home testing, telemedicine and treatment and workplace infrastructure and policy review.

We've spent years becoming the most regulated at-home reproductive care provider including being fully CQC-approved, MHRA-regulated and CE marked and we're committed to providing the highest quality service complete with a clinical care team with unparalleled education and training and a vetted network of partner clinics for further specialist treatment.

We're working with the world's most forward-thinking companies to work towards a workplace that's free of gender bias and discriminaton. To see how we can help your organisation, contact us at: benefits@hertilityhealth.com

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