

Menopause at Work: A Simple Guide for Employers

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has issued new guidance to help employers understand their legal duties regarding menopause in the workplace under the Equality Act 2010. This guide clarifies those obligations and provides practical advice on how to support employees experiencing menopause.

If menopause symptoms significantly affect a woman's ability to perform daily tasks over the long term, it may be considered a disability. This means employers have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments and ensure no discrimination occurs. Additionally, employees experiencing menopause symptoms may also be protected from unfair treatment related to their age and sex.

What Is Menopause?

Menopause is a natural stage in life that many women will experience, along with some transgender and non-binary people. It happens when the body's hormone levels change, typically around the ages of 45 to 55.

What Are the Symptoms?

Menopause can bring a range of symptoms, such as:

- Hot flushes and night sweats
- Sleep disturbances
- Headaches and migraines
- Low mood, anxiety, or stress
- Lack of concentration and memory issues
- Joint pain and fatigue

How Can Menopause Affect Employees at Work?

Employees going through menopause may experience the following challenges at work:

- Needing to take time off at short notice due to poor sleep or migraines

- Requiring regular or extended time off due to ongoing symptoms
- Difficulty arriving on time
- Needing more frequent or longer breaks
- Struggling to keep to strict shift patterns
- Difficulty concentrating or forgetfulness
- Increased irritability or lower patience levels
- Feeling uncomfortable in the work environment, especially if it's too warm
- Loss of self-confidence

These factors may affect performance, so it's important to encourage open communication and have a Menopause Policy in place. This shows that your organisation is supportive and inclusive.

What Should You Do If an Employee Is Struggling?

If you notice an employee struggling, have an open conversation with them. Don't assume it's menopause but, if it is, share your Menopause Policy to show the support you can offer.

Consider helping them by:

- Offering flexible working arrangements
- Making reasonable adjustments; e.g., moving desks to cooler spots or providing fans
- Sharing details of employee benefits or wellbeing programmes
- Checking in regularly to discuss how they are doing and what support is needed

Employee Rights During Menopause

The Equality Act 2010

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The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

As an employer, you have a legal duty to safeguard the health, safety, and welfare of all employees. A risk assessment should consider the needs of menopausal staff, such as:

- Allowing more breaks
- Providing access to drinking water
- Moving desks closer to toilets or providing a quiet rest area
- Ensuring access to natural light, good ventilation, or a fan

Flexible Working

UK employees with at least 26 weeks' service have the right to request flexible working, and many employers allow requests earlier than this period. You can include this in your Menopause Policy.

Flexible working options could include:

- Changing start or finish times
- Working from home either part-time or full-time
- Reducing hours or offering job-share arrangements

Menopause and Sick Leave

Some employees may need to take time off due to menopause-related symptoms such as anxiety, joint pain, or sleeplessness. It's important to record menopause-related absences separately and avoid routine disciplinary action, which could worsen anxiety or stress.

Each employee's experience of menopause is different, so consider their individual needs with compassion. Keeping a record of menopause-related absence, allowing more time for performance improvement, and offering a phased return to work are good practices.

Avoiding Discrimination and Dismissal Claims

Even though menopause is not directly protected under the Equality Act, employees are still protected from discrimination based on age, sex, or disability. Employment tribunal claims related to menopause discrimination are on the rise, so it's essential to handle these situations fairly and thoughtfully.

By being a supportive employer and having a clear Menopause Policy, you can foster a positive work environment and avoid such claims. Training all staff on menopause will help raise awareness and build a reputation as an inclusive, compassionate employer.

Training for Managers

According to a recent ACAS survey, 33% of employers don't feel confident supporting employees through menopause. Offering training for managers on how to support menopausal employees will ensure that your organisation is equipped to handle this sensitively and effectively.

Training for All Staff

Training should also be offered to all employees. This will help those going through menopause to understand how they can manage their symptoms and educate colleagues on how they can be supportive.

By taking these steps, you can help create a menopause-friendly workplace that promotes understanding, support, and wellbeing for everyone.

Need help?

If you would benefit from our support, please email us to book your free consultation:

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