



WALTHAMSTOW HALL
SEVENOAKS

MENOPAUSE POLICY

The following policy draws upon latest guidance by a number of bodies including ISBA, HR Adviser and ACAS. The menopause is not specifically protected under the Equality Act 2010 therefore guidance is currently non-statutory.

Overview

With more women over the age of 50 in employment than ever before, a rising number are going through the menopause during their working life. Some will experience serious symptoms that affect their work, either during menopause itself or the period leading up to it (the perimenopause).

Hormonal changes can affect women at various times in their life including when they are pregnant, having fertility treatment, under-going gender transitioning, receiving hormone treatment and during the menopause. Those changes can bring symptoms which manifest both physically and psychologically.

This policy focusses on menopause which is a natural part of every woman's life.

Menopause

- 1 This is when a woman's oestrogen levels decline, and she stops having periods (for 12 consecutive months). This typically is around the age of 50 but could be earlier or later.

Perimenopause

- 2 This is the phase leading up to the menopause, when changing levels of hormones lead to menopausal symptoms. This typically starts in a woman's mid to late forties but can be earlier.

Premature menopause

- 3 This happens when a woman's periods stop before the age of 45. It can happen when a woman's ovaries stop making normal levels of reproductive hormones including oestrogen or because of certain medical treatments including some cancer treatments.

Trans and non-binary employees may also experience the menopause and are covered by this policy.

Going through the menopause and the phase leading up to it isn't always an easy transition. Symptoms can have a significant effect on a woman's comfort and feelings of wellbeing in work including how she feels in work and about her work.

With the right support, it can be much better. Not everyone will have symptoms, but we aim to support those that do to improve their experience at work.

This policy should be read alongside our other policies which support an inclusive and supportive working environment both in work and when working from home. Those policies include our Flexible Working, Wellbeing, Equal Opportunities and Absence Management. It should also be read alongside our Data Protection policy.

This policy sets out the guidelines for our staff and managers. It does not form part of your employment contract, and we may update it at any time.

General Statement

As a School, we recognise that the impact of the menopause can be challenging and requires sensitivity and careful handling. Evidence suggests (ACAS Menopause at Work 2022) that many workers do not disclose their menopausal symptoms at work. In addition, many who take time off work because of the menopause do not tell their employer the real reasons for their absence.

We aim to create an environment in which all our employees feel informed about the menopause and are comfortable and confident talking about its impact on their physical and mental health. We want everyone to understand what the menopause is and to be able to talk about it openly, without embarrassment. We recognise that this is not just an issue for women and aim to raise awareness of it with our male colleagues as well.

Aims of this Policy

- To demonstrate that the School takes the well-being of staff seriously and ensure women suffering from symptoms ask for support and any reasonable adjustments they need to continue to work effectively; staff will be supported where necessary.
- To take measures to ensure that Senior and other Management are aware of the condition and symptoms.
- To support staff with sensitivity and to provide reassurance to them that their needs will be handled confidentially and fairly.
- To ensure that staff are treated with respect and dignity.
- Reduce absenteeism due to menopausal symptoms.

What is the menopause?

The menopause is a natural stage of life for women, usually in their late forties/early fifties. It can also happen earlier or later. For many women symptoms last about four years, but in some cases can last longer - up to 12 years. Part of the process includes what is termed the 'perimenopause' when a woman's body is starting to change in the build up to the menopause. The perimenopause usually starts in the mid-forties but can start earlier or later and last several years.

Symptoms of the Menopause

The menopause produces a range of physical and psychological symptoms that can affect many aspects of life, all related to the changes in hormone balance. Every woman is different and not

all will be affected in the same way or to the same extent. The specific symptoms can vary from very mild to severe, and from person to person. Some symptoms may include:

- Difficulty sleeping and night sweats.
- Feeling tired and lacking energy.
- Mood swings.
- Feeling anxious and panic attacks.
- Hot flushes.
- Struggling to remember things, concentrate and focus.
- Taking longer to recover from illness.
- Irregular periods which can become heavier.
- Aches and pains including muscle and joint stiffness.
- Urinary problems.
- Headaches including migraines.
- Putting on weight.
- Noticeable heartbeats.
- Skin irritation.
- Dry eyes.

NB, it is important to recognise that the number and severity of symptoms may differ from person to person and that it is likely that the effects of the menopause can, for example, lead to staff:

- Feeling ill.
- Losing confidence.
- Suffering from mental health conditions such as stress, anxiety and depression.

On average, menopause symptoms last around four years but can last as long as 12 years. All women are different. Some will experience symptoms over a relatively brief period; others may experience symptoms for many years. Women can also experience different symptoms at various times during this transition.

UNDERSTANDING THE MENOPAUSE

Despite its potentially serious impact on a woman's everyday life, the menopause is still not spoken about as freely as some other physical or mental health issues. We aim to do things differently so that the menopause becomes a normal part of the health and wellbeing conversation.

Through training and raising awareness of the symptoms and related issues, we aim to promote an organisation wide understanding of what the menopause means for those going through it. This is essential to building a culture of openness, trust, sensitivity, and respect around what is for many women a challenging time in their lives.

We may need to make certain things easier for women going through it to ease their symptoms or to help them to manage them. Some small adjustments can make a substantial impact in helping women carry out their daily role, feel supported in work and feel comfortable in the work environment. In doing this, we hope to have discussions and put arrangements in place which is part of our inclusive work culture.

- We may not be able to tell you about any menopause related issues that a particular colleague is experiencing. We need you to accept that and respect their privacy.
- If you treat a colleague badly (including making unwanted comments or jokes) because of her menopause symptoms, you could be disciplined.

For managers, recognising the symptoms of the menopause is vital to treating an affected employee fairly. It can explain certain behaviours that may not normally be displayed by an individual which are affecting their conduct, performance, or attendance at work.

HELPING YOU THROUGH THE MENOPAUSE

If you are going through the menopause and are finding things difficult at work, do not suffer in silence.

We know that the menopause is a very personal matter, so we would not usually raise it with you even if we think you are displaying symptoms. We might ask how you are, in general terms and encourage you to be open with us. You can then decide whether to talk to us about the menopause or not. We would encourage you to do so because we will want to support you and can do that if we know what is happening.

We have included links to organisations that provide useful information about the menopause at the end of this policy and recommend that you access these if you need more information.

We have a four-step procedure that applies to discussions around the menopause and the action we will take:

Step 1

Speaking with your GP or medical specialist about your menopause related concerns could be a good place for you to start. It will hopefully help you access evidence-based information about the menopause and inform our conversations with you about the workplace impact. [Please speak to your manager if you need support to access a GP appointment.]

You can also talk to the HR Manager. Or, you could go straight to your manager instead if you feel comfortable doing that.

Step 2

Meet with your manager. You should expect to be able to have a private, friendly, honest, and constructive conversation. Please let your line manager know if you would like someone from HR to be at the meeting too.

We will discuss ideas that could make things easier for you. Adjustments will depend on the symptoms you are experiencing and, if relevant, the budget we have available. Things that some women may find helpful include:

Hot flushes

- Controlling the temperature of your work area, such as providing a desktop fan, moving near a window or away from a heat source.
- Providing easy access to drinking water.
- Modifying our [uniform] [dress code].
- Having access to a rest room for breaks if your work involves extended periods of standing or sitting, or a quiet area if you need to manage a severe hot flush.

Heavy periods

- Allowing you to work somewhere with easy access to toilets.
- Asking for an extra uniform.
- Providing access to sanitary products.
- Providing storage space for a change of clothing.

Headaches

- Providing easy access to drinking water.
- Providing a quiet space to work.
- Providing noise-reducing headphones to wear in open offices.

Low mood

- Agreeing time out from others, when required, without needing to ask for permission.
- Having access to a quiet area.

Loss of confidence

- Having regular protected time with your manager to discuss any issues.

Poor concentration

- Adjusting work patterns.
- Reviewing task allocation and workload.
- Providing quiet spaces to work.
- Offering noise reducing headphones to wear in open offices.
- Reducing interruptions.
- Agreeing protected time when you won't be disturbed.

Panic attacks and anxiety

- Providing mindfulness training or counselling for anxiety.
- Agreeing to have time away from work to undertake relaxation techniques or going for a walk.

Please note: we have included these potential adjustments to help you and your manager consider how best to support you and what may be possible. However, we will consider

each case individually and if there are other things, you'd like us to consider to help you, please ask.

Your manager will record any adjustments agreed and any actions to be implemented and will review these from time to time to ensure that they remain suitable.

Your manager may need to discuss issues and practical solutions with other professionals including HR, SMG or your GP, particularly if the adjustments don't appear to be working or advice is needed on what is most appropriate for you.

We will work hard to balance your needs with those of your colleagues, however on occasions we may not be able to find a solution that works for everyone.

We will usually not talk to your colleagues, other than those included above, about the menopause related difficulties you are having unless you ask us to or agree that we can.

We will keep notes of the things we discuss and will comply with our data protection responsibilities in respect of the information that passes between us. That is in line with our Data Protection Policy.

After your initial meeting with your manager, and periodically after that, we may carry out health and safety risk assessments and/or seek advice from occupational health or other medical professionals.

Step 3

Taking account of any specialist advice, we will agree with you the adjustments that we will make.

We will meet with you to make sure that the adjustments are working for you and for us. If any modifications are needed, or if anything new needs to be put in place, we will discuss that with you.

Step 4

We will meet with you on an ongoing basis to check that your symptoms are being managed effectively. The regularity of these will depend on each individual need.

You may find that your symptoms change over time. You don't have to wait for your manager to schedule a review. If the adjustments are not working as well as you hoped, or you start to experience new symptoms, please tell us, and arrange a further meeting with your manager. Once your symptoms pass, we would expect you to tell us, and we may discuss with you removing the adjustments that had been put in place.

We may need to consult with occupational health at various points to ensure everything is being done that should be done.

OTHER SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Employees may also benefit from accessing some of these resources. If you do not wish to discuss your symptoms with your manager, we encourage you to look here first. If you do speak with your manager, they will refer you and encourage you to look here too:

A Counselling service is available through the School's Insurers.

The Sisters are also available to offer advice

SOME USEFUL RESOURCES

The following are links to some sites which provide information that may be helpful to both managers and women who are having menopausal symptoms.

- The NHS website has some good, basic information about the menopause:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>

- The British Menopause Society

<https://thebms.org.uk>

- Women's Health Concern

<https://www.womens-health-concern.org>

- The Daisy Network (for women experiencing premature menopause or ovarian insufficiency)

www.daisynetwork.org

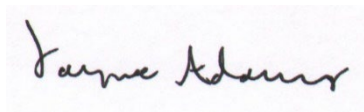
- You can also download a free app to help you manage and track your symptoms, access personalised expert advice, and obtain support. An example is this one:

<https://balance-app.com/>

Walthamstow Hall policies are approved, ratified and reviewed regularly by the Governing Body in the light of statutory requirements.

Reviewed: November 2023

Next Review Date: November 2024



Signed:

.....Date:17 November 2023.....

Mrs J Adams
Chairman of the Governing Body