

Menopause in the workplace

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More women are working through menopause during crucial career phases, prompting the need for workplaces to recognise and address this important life stage.

Menopause should not be a taboo subject at work, nor should it force women to pause their careers.

What role can FM play?

Often, a few simple changes to someone's working environment can make a world of difference – enabling someone experiencing menopausal symptoms to continue performing and contributing to their full potential.

What is menopause?

Menopause signifies a woman's 12 consecutive months without a menstrual period, with symptoms potentially starting years before this (known as perimenopause). The typical age range for menopause is 45 to 55, with an average age of 51 in the U.K. "Early menopause" applies to those under 45, or any age following a hysterectomy, chemotherapy, or radiotherapy that affects ovarian function.

Symptoms

Sometimes the lead-up to menopause has no impact and women can sail through it with barely a symptom. But this transitional period is not easy for all.

Hormone fluctuations, including erratic oestrogen and declining progesterone levels, lead to a wide array of symptoms: mood swings, anxiety, depression, brain fog, weight changes, skin alterations (like acne or dryness), panic attacks, hot flashes, night sweats, insomnia, and reduced confidence.

Our top tips:

1. An open culture

Open conversations and understanding change mindsets and cultures. Even just being able to talk openly can reduce the impact of someone's symptoms. Leadership is important, when those at the top demonstrate they're open to conversation, it sets the right tone and encourages others.

If you're concerned about a colleague, a genuine enquiry is far better than saying nothing. Avoid direct questioning; "Do you have menopause symptoms?"

Instead, ask general, open questions; "How are you doing at the moment?"

- Practical facilities

Being human means, we feel temperature differently – menopausal or not – male or female.

Workplaces often have hot and cold areas; can people choose where they sit rather than comply with a seating plan? Are desk fans available, are there well-ventilated desk areas? Easy access to good toilets and drinking water is also critical.

If employees wear a uniform, think about the materials – are they breathable? Natural fibres work best. Don't make them different, no woman wants to flag their 'menopausal status' by wearing a different colour uniform.

- Lifestyle interventions

It's important to provide women with access to knowledge, information and support on diet and lifestyle habits that can support them and help manage symptoms.

Studies show stress (cortisol) increases the intensity of hot flashes or night sweats and disruptions in cortisol will impact anxiety, sleep, and brain fog – so stress management is critical. Our Understanding and Embracing Menopause presentation is a fantastic offering for women to learn more about diet and lifestyle advice.

- Green spaces

There is a growing body of research into being in nature or green spaces and their ability to reduce chronic stress, specifically cortisol.

A 2021 review suggests spending time in green space may have a profound impact on reducing cortisol. Changing workplace location isn't always feasible, so a simple step could be to introduce indoor plants. Research shows that the presence of indoor plants can reduce stress and anxiety levels, which is critical for symptom management and improvement.

- Regular screen breaks

Screen breaks can improve concentration and productivity and help with brain fog and tiredness. The Pomodoro Technique can be a helpful tool. This breaks focused screen time down into 25-minute blocks with a 5-minute break between each block, after which a longer break. It can make work more enjoyable.

- Strength training

Studies showed that building muscle can improve hot flushes. More muscle mass improves the efficiency of energy (glucose) into brain cells and boosts a protein called Brain Derived Neurotrophic Factor that stimulates the production of new brain cells and strengthens existing ones. It therefore protects the brain and cognitive function, now and future.

To encourage movement, you could think about introducing standing desks or posting information by lifts to encourage people to take the stairs instead.

- Regular movement

This helps improve circulation to the brain which can help with brain fog and mood.

It also releases feel-good hormones such as serotonin and dopamine.

Simply getting your heart pumping and a little sweat on – morning walks in nature can be great, followed by regular movement ‘snacks’. A walking rather than a sit-down meeting can help boost focus and reduce stress levels. Organising cross-organisational or team challenges, like a step count challenge, could also help encourage activity.

For more tips, please request our healthy menopause tips poster from: info@superwellness.co.uk.

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