

## **POLICY FOR SUPPORTING THE IMPACT OF MENOPAUSE AT WORK**

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# **1. INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE OF POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Menopause is a transitional stage experienced by women, Trans, non-binary and inter-sex people. The transition period referred to as Menopause is unique to each person and not everyone will experience it at the same time. While the majority of people will transition during their mid-40's to mid-50's, others will experience early menopause due to, for example surgery or premature ovarian inefficiency. Menopause can have an impact on people to a greater or lesser extent and for up to 8 years. Many people will experience few or mild symptoms of menopause however many more will experience severe and at times, life changing symptoms that can have a significant and detrimental impact on both their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

NHS Lincolnshire ICB recognises this transition including peri-menopause and menopause (hereinafter referred to as menopause) has the potential to significantly affect individuals in the workplace which may present in multiple ways and present a number of issues or challenges for both the employee and employer. The ICB aims to remove any potential or perceived taboo or bias surrounding menopause to ensure employees experiencing symptoms have access to support whilst at work.

Everyone's experience of the menopause is individual and may differ greatly. But inevitably the symptoms will be exacerbated by negative or discriminatory attitudes in the workplace and symptoms of menopause are often mistaken for other more common mental or physical illnesses including, for example depression, anxiety, migraine and chronic fatigue. Supporting our staff to receive the correct diagnosis and treatment for their symptoms is important to ensure effective and reasonable adjustments are made for the employee whilst at work.

The ICB is committed to ensuring all employees are treated fairly and with dignity and respect at work whilst taking a proactive approach to promote a wider understanding of the menopause, its symptoms; physical and emotional impact to prevent any discrimination or exclusion.

This policy provides guidance to both employees who may be experiencing symptoms as well as guidance for managers to manage and support individuals through the transition.

## **1.2 PURPOSE AND AIMS**

This policy applies to all staff. All employees should familiarise them self with the policy to develop an understanding of the impact of the menopause on people; their life and physical or mental health.

This policy aims to make staff aware of how menopause may affect people and the issues which may arise as a result of those, in the workplace. This will aid an environment where staff can openly raise any issues to get the right support at work.

The policy is intended to help staff to receive sufficient support and give managers the confidence and guidance to be able to do this.

The policy details some reasonable adjustments that could be considered to help keep employees experiencing symptoms comfortable at work as well as detailing where extra support can be found. Any adjustments should be identified and agreed between the member of staff and their line manager or supporting manager.

Under the Equality Act 2010 it is the ICB's legal duty to manage age and sex related issues effectively and without discrimination, therefore the principles outlined in this policy must be followed.

## **2. IMPACT ANALYSIS / REGULATIONS**

### **2.1 Equality**

The ICB is committed to designing and implementing services, policies and measures that meet the diverse needs of its population and workforce, ensuring that no individual or group is disadvantaged.

In developing and applying this policy, the ICB will have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between people of diverse groups, in particular on the grounds of the following characteristics protected by the Equality Act (2010); age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation, in addition to offending background, trade union membership, or any other personal characteristic.

### **2.2 General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)**

The ICB is committed to ensuring that all personal information is managed in accordance with current data protection legislation, professional codes of practice and records management and confidentiality guidance. More detailed information can be found in the ICBs Data Protection and Confidentiality Policy and related policies and procedures.

## **3. ROLES / RESPONSIBILITIES / DUTIES**

### **3.1 Responsibilities of Senior Managers**

This role involves:

- Promote a fair and equitable working environment.
- Create a comfortable working environment with all the necessary facilities and amenities.
- Commit to the delivery of training and engagement for all employees in relation to menopause

### **3.2 Responsibilities of Human Resources**

The role of Human Resources is:

- Advise on the application and interpretation of this policy.
- Ensure there is a consistent application of the policy.
- Support employees and line managers on the content of this policy.

### **3.3 Responsibilities of Individual Staff Members**

All employees are expected to:

- Familiarise themselves with this policy to raise understanding and awareness of menopause.
- Speak to their line manager if they are experiencing symptoms being as open as they feel they can be in order to receive sufficient support.
- Work with their line manager to consider and discuss solutions to help alleviate the effects that symptoms may have in the workplace, particularly if they feel their performance is suffering as a result and ensure documented in one to one meetings.
- Treat everyone with dignity and respect and create an environment which reflects this.

### **3.4 Responsibilities of Line Manager**

Line managers are expected to:

- Familiarise themselves with menopausal symptoms and best practice guides for managers. (Please note that you are not expected to become an expert but should be able to recognise basic symptoms and their impact).
- Be as supportive as possible when issues relating to menopause are raised.
- Hold regular and documented one to one meetings to ensure there is a constant dialogue regarding their employee's wellbeing and to give them a forum to raise any issues.
- Encourage employees to discuss their feelings as emotions can be heightened during this time.
- Undertake a risk assessment where necessary,
- Consider any reasonable adjustments which would help support the employee at work and help them thrive.
- Listen and take on board any feedback they receive from a delegated manager following discussions with the employee (note this will only apply when the employee has requested they discuss their symptoms with a different manager).

## **4. DEFINITIONS**

### **4.1 Menopause**

The menopause is a natural part of ageing that usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, as a person's oestrogen levels decline. In the UK, the average age to reach the menopause is 51 however some people experience this early for example to due surgery of premature ovarian inefficiency.

### **4.2 Peri-Menopause**

Peri-menopause is the pre-menopause stage. Many people experience symptoms of menopause during this stage as symptoms generally start a few months or years before the period stops.

## 5. SYMPTOMS

Menopause affects people differently however below are some common symptoms. The duration and severity of these symptoms varies from person to person however some of these can have a significant impact on someone's everyday life.

- Tired and lacking energy
- Hot flushes
- Night sweats
- Anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Low mood
- Difficulties concentrating/forgetfulness
- Headaches/migraines
- Abdominal pain
- Difficulty sleeping
- Palpitations
- Heavy periods
- Reduced confidence
- Forgetfulness

Clearly any and all of these symptoms would affect someone in their day-to-day lives, including at work.

These symptoms can start years before periods stop and last on average 4 years after the last period however this can go on for much longer. This can have a significant impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing which may affect work.

It is important these symptoms are recognised and appropriate steps are taken to help people experiencing them feel more comfortable so they are better able to function both at work and home.

## 6. REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

Certain aspects of a job or the workplace can present a barrier for someone experiencing menopausal symptoms. If this is the case then line managers have a responsibility to implement any reasonable adjustments that may help staff manage their symptoms at work. Reasonable adjustments should be agreed with the employee following discussions on how their symptoms affect them at work.

The following guidance is a useful resource for managers [HSWPG-menopause-at-work-March-2020-FINAL.pdf](#) (nhsemployers.org) to help facilitate these discussions and can provide further information about reasonable adjustments and other support.

Further practical guidance for managers is available here: [A guide to managing menopause at work: guidance for line managers](#)

It is important to note that in some circumstances, conditions arising from the menopause may also meet the definition of 'impairment' under the Equality Act 2010. If there is any doubt about whether absences will qualify as an impairment under the Act, further advice and guidance should be sought from the occupational health team at the earliest opportunity.

Below are some examples of reasonable adjustments which may help:

- Encouraging the employee to work in a quiet meeting room, alone from time to time if this helps them concentrate.
- Ensuring they take short screen breaks and rests throughout the day if they experience tiredness.
- If they are experiencing hot flushes arrange for them to sit near a window or in a ventilated area or provide a desk based fan if ventilation is not available.
- Be as flexible as possible with start and finish times, employees may feel tired in a morning or lack energy later in the day try to work around this where this is possible.
- Allow the employee to discuss menopause with a different delegated manager instead of their line manager should they not be comfortable discussing this with theirs. Although where possible the ICB recommends that the employee discusses this with the line manager.
- Give them flexibility to attend appointments
- Provide extra support and guidance if they're struggling to concentrate or have reduced confidence.
- Allow them to work from home where possible, they may have had a poor night's sleep or have a heavy period.
- Explore temporary adjustments to tasks and duties that are proving a challenge.
- Explore protected time to catch up with work if required.

Should an employee hit a sickness trigger point due to menopause related absences an occupational health referral should be made. Discretion can be used in agreeing what action to take however this should be made in conjunction with occupational health advice and in consultation with the HR team to ensure a fair and consistent approach is maintained.

Occupational health advice can also be sought to get further advice on supporting someone experiencing symptoms at work.

## **7. ADVICE FOR LINE MANAGERS**

Line managers should be both supportive and aware of menopausal symptoms so that employees do not feel embarrassed to approach them and discuss this. Having some understanding of how menopause affects people will help this, the menopause can be extremely daunting to raise with someone who has no idea about the issue.

Hold regular one-to-one meetings as part of a normal working routine, to give employees an open forum to discuss any concerns they may have. It is important you appreciate that it may be hard for them to discuss these concerns with you, try to prompt them to explain by regularly asking how they are.

Be aware that you can seek occupational health advice regarding menopause if you feel you need further advice and remind the employee that they can also self-refer to occupational health and access services such as counselling.

Should an employee feel uncomfortable discussing their symptoms with their line manager they can request a different delegated manager to do this instead. This request should only come from the employee and not the line manager and the delegated manager should feedback to the line manager so they are aware how the symptoms may be affecting the employee at work.

Managers are not expected to be an expert, one of the most valuable things a line manager can do is to listen and respond sympathetically, try to brush up on the facts, keep an open mind and show empathy in understanding what they are going through.

If the employee is experiencing either physical or psychological problems there is a range of support available including referrals to occupational health, the ICBs Employee Assistance Programme and resources which can be found on the ICBs intranet: [Staff support and wellbeing - Lincolnshire ICB](#)

## **8.1 Tips on Holding Sensitive Conversations**

Following the above principles will make it much easier to have conversations with employees regarding menopause however the below points provide some further tips to holding sensitive conversations:

- Avoid interruptions
- Listen actively
- Encourage the employee to talk
- Avoid judgemental responses
- Be sympathetic
- Be calm
- Ask open ended questions

## **9. ADVICE FOR STAFF EXPERIENCING SYMPTOMS OF MENOPAUSE**

Staff experiencing symptoms of menopause that are affecting them at work should try to discuss this with their manager, the more open and honest they can be the more support that can be put in place.

Staff are to be reminded that they can self-refer to occupational health for support and access services such as counselling or speak to one of the ICB's mental health first aiders. Staff should also be reminded that they can contact their GP practice should they need to and discuss treatment options with them.

It is important any staff experiencing symptoms of the menopause get sufficient rest and relaxation and drink plenty of water.

For further information on symptoms please see NHS website:

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

### **9.1 Services Available**

Some employees do not need assistance during menopause and go through it without medical or alternative interventions. Some choose a treatment option and there are a few different options which the employer should support including time off for consultation and monitoring progress in accordance with ICB policies.

Options include hormone replacement therapy (HRT), anti-depressants or anti-anxiety medications, natural treatments and remedies and lifestyle support such as diet and exercise. However, it is not the employer's role to suggest or discuss treatment options. This is a decision for the member of staff in consultation with their GP.

If advice and guidance is required, then an Occupational Health referral (either via the line manager or self-referral can be made). This can provide a gateway to other support e.g. counselling.

Employees should be reminded that they can access other NHS services such as Talking Therapy and Emotional Wellbeing services which can enable access to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to help people develop techniques to tackle stress and anxiety.

Details on where these services can be accessed depending on location are listed below

[Staff support and wellbeing - Lincolnshire ICB](#)

## **10. ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE AND INFORMATION**

- CIPD Menopause Guide  
[https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/menopause-guide\\_tcm18-55426.pdf](https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/menopause-guide_tcm18-55426.pdf)
- CIPD Menopause at work – A Practical Guide for People Managers  
[https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/menopause-guide-for-people-managers\\_tcm18-55548.pdf](https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/menopause-guide-for-people-managers_tcm18-55548.pdf)
- NHS Employers: Menopause and the Workplace  
<https://www.nhsemployers.org/retention-and-staff-experience/health-and-wellbeing/taking-a-targeted-approach/taking-a-targeted-approach/menopause-in-the-workplace>
- ACAS Menopause at Work  
<https://archive.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=6752>
- NHS Website – Menopause  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>

## **11. IMPLEMENTATION**

The Senior Managers Operational Delivery Group is responsible for formal approval this policy. Following ratification the policy will be shared with staff and will be available on the intranet.

## **12. TRAINING AND AWARENESS**

Advice can be sought from the HR team on the implementation and interpretation of this policy.

The ICB is committed to delivering training and awareness sessions for staff and managers including facilitating Menopause cafes to provide a discussion forum for employees experiencing symptoms, their colleagues and managers.

## **13. MONITORING AND EFFECTIVENESS**

The implementation of this policy will be monitored on an annual basis by the ICB and reported to the ICB Exec's.

## **14. POLICY REVIEW**

This Policy will be reviewed annually from the date of implementation.

## **15. REFERENCES**

- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992

## **16. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTATION**

- Leave Policy