

Let's start a conversation about menopause at work

Menopause is a Trade Union issue

A majority (79%) of the jobs in the health and social work sector are held by women so it's shocking that social workers are regularly facing unsympathetic treatment and possible discrimination in workplaces poorly equipped to deal with menopause.

Employers have a duty to prevent workplace discrimination and to make reasonable adjustments to ensure anyone experiencing menopause can work safely through it. Menopause at work is covered by certain pieces of legislation to protect employees:

- Equality Act 2010 (age, sex, disability discrimination)
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (working conditions when experiencing symptoms)
- The new Acas codes of practice (flexible working)

The BASW / SWU Advice and Representation Service has developed a reasonable adjustment passport for members in situations where they have a disability or they have a situation that requires some out of the box thinking - this includes menopause.

Your employer may also provide an employee assistance Programme (EAP).

"The key to tackling menopause-related issues at work is to speak out early. If you approach us, we will discuss the issues with you and consider next steps."

Lisa Fitzpatrick, SWU Trade Union Official

Menopause facts

Menopause affects anyone born with ovaries - this includes women and people who are trans, non-binary, and intersex

8 out of 10 experience noticeable symptoms and feel menopause affects their working life

1 in 4 experience severely debilitating menopausal symptoms

Menopause usually happens between the ages of 45 and 55

The average age for menopause in the UK is 51

Menopause can happen at any age as a result of surgery, illness, or an issue with the function of the ovaries known as premature ovarian failure (POI)

Possible symptoms

Everyone experiences menopause differently. Menopausal symptoms can pose major and embarrassing problems for some, leaving them to feel less confident and at odds with their desired professional image. Main problems at work can stem from these symptoms:

- Hot flushes
- Night sweats
- Anxiety
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Memory loss
- Depression
- Headaches
- Recurrent urinary tract infections
- Joint stiffness, aches and pains
- Reduced concentration
- Heavy periods

In the Workplace

Colleagues should be encouraged to talk about their symptoms and how these might be affecting their work and to ask for support if needed.

Regular, informal conversation between colleagues and line managers about their symptoms and the effect these are having in the workplace can identify practical changes which can help to alleviate their impact. The changes don't need to be costly or complicated. It is important, however, that social workers feel empowered to speak openly about their health issues and ask for help.

Some people are reluctant to talk about menopause related health problems with their line managers, or to ask for support. This can result in an increase in sickness absence and potentially someone leaving their job.

Employers can help by communicating to their workforce that health-related problems such as menopause are normal. Fostering a culture of awareness, openness and inclusivity will help people to feel supported during this normal life stage.

Important factors for managing menopause in the workplace:

- Flexible working
- Adjustment to shift patterns
- Office conditions
- General awareness



Further information

TUC guidance for union representatives: Supporting working women through the menopause

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/resource/supporting-working-women-through-menopause>

Community Trade Union: Menopause at Work campaign

<https://community-tu.org/campaigns/menopause-at-work>

NHS England: Why is the menopause relevant to our organisation and to me and my team?

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/midlands/wp-content/uploads/sites/46/2022/01/NHSEI-Menopause-Awareness-Training-Pack-v4-.pdf>

Menopause Whilst Black podcast

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/menopause-whilst-black/id1537012198>

Queer / LGBTQIA+ Menopause: Inclusive menopause information

<https://www.queermenopause.com>

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