

MENOPAUSE

What does it mean for managers in the workplace?

The menopause is a normal life event for women. As well as affecting the woman herself, it can also impact on her family and colleagues. Despite this, the menopause remains a taboo subject in many homes and workplaces.

In this cheat sheet, we look at ways in which you can normalise conversations about the menopause in your department.



There are no hard and fast rules...

Some women sail through the menopause, others have debilitating symptoms and everyone else experiences something in between.

1 in 100 women will experience a premature menopause, perhaps at a time when they are still planning to conceive.

The menopause usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, although it can occur any time up until a woman is in her mid-60s. It can also start when a woman is much younger than 45. Women can be perimenopausal for several years before their periods stop.

Symptoms can last for a few months for some people, others can experience symptoms for up to 14 years. The average is between 4 and 8 years.

How can you help?

KNOW THAT...

In November 2016, the Faculty of Occupational Medicine introduced new guidelines for women entitled 'Guidance on menopause and the workplace'. These practical guidelines aim to help women experiencing troublesome menopausal symptoms, and to support them, their colleagues and managers in tackling the occupational aspects of menopausal symptoms.

BE AWARE

If you regularly and informally ask after your team's wellbeing, they are more likely to share any difficulties that they are having. For example, it might come to light that someone is having their sleep disturbed regularly, by night sweats.

Having regular catch ups will also help you understand if there is a change in a person's behaviour. For example, lack of concentration and temporarily forgetting things are other effects. If a woman is of a certain age and showing these behaviours, it may be that you can approach a conversation sensitively.

BE SENSITIVE

Everyone is different. Some women will want to talk about the menopause and it's your responsibility, as a manager, to be sensitive to the person in front of you, approachable, understanding, caring and open.

Empathy is a key factor, as well as listening and showing respect for any concerns one of your team may have.

Of course, some women will not want to have a conversation with their manager at all. This may be because they feel embarrassed, they could be lacking confidence or finding their symptoms stressful to deal with. In these situations, think of ways in which you could encourage them to chat to a colleague or family member that they are more comfortable with.

Some women might prefer to speak to their GP or an occupational health professional. A follow up email, to ask if and how you can support, is likely to be appreciated by your colleague.

As a manager you should also know who the woman can go to, in your organisation, e.g. if she would rather chat with someone of the same gender.

Finally...

As a manager, you have responsibilities for the health and safety of our team. So, you need to make sure that you better understand their difficulties and needs.

If it is done in a sensitive manner, you may find that discussing gender-specific health issues as a team helps everyone to gain a better understanding and supportive attitude.

Here are some useful conversation starters. Remember, they are just suggestions. Putting it into your own style and language will help it to come across as more human and natural:

- I was wondering how you're feeling today?
- I've noticed X a couple of times, is everything okay? Is there anything that I can do to help?
- You don't seem to be quite yourself at the moment – is there anything that you'd like me to know, so that I can support you?

Remember that all conversations and communication should be kept strictly confidential.