Supporting employees through the menopause

24/7 professional support for businesses, across employment law, HR and health and safety

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Run time: Approx 50 mins
The detail contained within this webinar is based on GB and Northern Ireland employment legislation.

Members in the jurisdictions of Republic of Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey and Isle of Man are asked to please contact the Advice Service to obtain the information relevant to your jurisdiction.
Today we will cover...

• The definition and symptoms of the menopause
• The best methods to prepare to support employees going through the menopause
• Assisting employees who come forward with symptoms relating to the menopause
Understanding the menopause

• The menopause is the time during a woman’s life when menstruation periods permanently stop

• This can cause a chain reaction of physical and psychological side-effects to a woman’s body

• Whilst symptoms vary from person to person, they can be present for up to 12 years
Who does the menopause affect?

- Generally, women in their mid to late 40s or early 50s
- However, 1 in 20 women may go through an early menopause
- The menopause can be induced earlier due to a separate illness such as cancer, or surgical intervention
- Trans men who are proposing to go through, or have already gone through, the process to change gender from a woman to a man may also experience symptoms
Legal implications of the menopause

• Health and safety at work

• Disability discrimination

• Sex discrimination/harassment

• Age discrimination
The advantages of being ready to respond to the menopause

• Avoid legal liabilities
• Work against employees taking prolonged periods of time away from work
• Encourage employee retention
• Improve the external reputation of the company

By 2022, it is forecast that around one in six women in the workforce will be over 50
Supporting employees through the menopause

Physical symptoms of the menopause

- Hot flushes
- Fatigue
- Dry eyes
- Urinary problems
- Hair loss
- Headaches

This is not an exhaustive list and symptoms may be more severe for some employees.
Psychological symptoms of the menopause

- Depression
- Problems with memory
- Anxiety
- Loss of confidence
- Panic attacks
- Mood swings

This is not an exhaustive list and symptoms may be more severe for some employees.
Why employees do not come forward

- Not wanting to discuss a sensitive topic with management – for example, they may feel uncomfortable talking to a manager who is younger, male or unsympathetic
- Concerned how their colleagues will react and act around them
- Worried that this disclosure may impact upon future promotion/development opportunities
- May struggle to communicate due to language barriers
- Denial
Preparing to assist employees going through the menopause
Raising awareness

- Hold lunchtime awareness sessions and workshops
- Provide leaflets and signposting
- Organise workplace menopause action and support groups
- Liaise with third-party organisations
- Provide access to an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)
Training managers

• All line managers, and HR representatives, should be familiar with company procedures/policies on the menopause and know how to respond to employees who come forward in a non-discriminatory and open manner.

• Managers should always take this seriously; for example, they should never attempt to trivialise a woman’s experience, such as saying her colleague did not have it as bad.

• It is also advisable to have a specially trained point of contact within the organisation, such as a welfare officer, trade union rep or counsellor, for employees to go to.
Carrying out a risk assessment

Poorly adapted workplace environments/practices can make symptoms worse. Employers should regularly assess:

- ventilation and air quality
- access to drinking water
- toilet facilities
- temperature/light control
- uniforms and protective equipment
- flexibility of break times
- workloads
- awareness of the menopause
- training open to managers
- negative attitudes
- instances of bullying or harassment
- insecure employment
Appointing a Menopause Champion

Point of contact for employees and managers

- Can help in raising awareness
- Can check suitability of risk assessments
- Can provide input into ongoing discussions
Constructing a company policy on the menopause

A policy can clearly outline any organisational procedures that are in place to assist women going through the menopause. It should include:

- Clarity on what the menopause is.
- Information on how women who are suffering from the menopause can raise this issue at work, such as telling the Menopause Champion.
- Outline factors that the company accepts may make it difficult for women in the workplace in this situation.
- Confirm the additional internal and external support that will be offered.
Assisting employees going through the menopause
Holding a discussion with the employee

- Employees should only come forward of their own choice.
- They should be provided the option to speak to someone who isn’t their manager, such as the representative or Menopause Champion.
- An objective discussion should be held over their particular problems and steps that can be taken to assist them.
- All discussions should be recorded in writing, but kept confidential.
- Any changes should be regularly reviewed.
Potential options to consider

- move employee closer to toilets
- let employee use separate toilets
- move employee from hot/cold spots
- avoid nylon uniforms
- provide alternatives to heavy lifting
- allow additional rest breaks
- permit flexible working
- ensure sufficient ventilation
- provide access to an EAP
- refer employee to external companies
- provide space for employee to rest
Managing employee absence

- There may be times when employees are absent from work
- Employers should try to remain flexible and supportive in these situations
- It is advisable that these absences are not noted on an absence record or lead to any form of disciplinary warning
- Return to work meetings should always be held to assess what further support can be provided to an employee
- Obtain a GP report if necessary
Being mindful of bullying behaviour

• Bullying can serve to make symptoms of the menopause worse and potentially lead to related issues such as stress or depression

• A zero-tolerance approach should be operated towards any form of bullying

• All accusations should be processed in line with usual company policies

• Be aware of accusations of employee favouritism
• The menopause primarily affects women in their 40s and 50s but can also occur earlier in their lives

• The symptoms of the menopause can have a significant affect upon employees whilst at work

• Employers should take steps to raise awareness of, and train managers to respond to, the menopause. They may also consider establishing a Menopause Champion
Summary 2/2

- Employees who come forward must be spoken to in an open and non-discriminatory manner
- Adjustments should be made to assist them in their roles
- Employers should be mindful of bullying in the workplace
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