



INFORMATION FOR COLLEAGUES

Menopause Guidance



Throughout this info, we sometimes use the terms 'women', 'female' and 'her'. However, we recognise that people from different communities can also experience menopause or symptoms as a result of hormonal changes.

Introduction

At the RIBA, not only do we care about the health and wellbeing of our people, but we believe support for those going through the menopause is a fundamental human right.

We all need to understand more about menopause and other hormonal transitions, so we can offer the right support to you and your colleagues.

We recognise that menopause can affect us all, personally and professionally, and we want to help all our colleagues be the best they can be. Understanding the menopause is important for everyone – all genders – whether they're experiencing it themselves or providing support for a fellow colleague, family member or friend. In addition, anyone can be affected by hormonal changes during their lives for a number of reasons, including pregnancy, fertility treatment, transitioning procedures, conditions needing hormone treatment, and menopause. These can bring about symptoms which could affect someone at work.

Trans people and the menopause

Some trans people will have medical interventions, such as hormone therapy and surgeries. However, not all trans people want this, or are able to. There are particular issues they may experience when going through the menopause.

LGBTQ+ people and the menopause

Women in same-sex relationships may go through the menopause at the same time as their partners. This can be positive, in terms of increased mutual understanding and support. However, if both partners are experiencing symptoms, this may be difficult for them.

Menopause is a stage of most women's lives. This isn't always an easy transition, but with the right support it can be much better. While everyone doesn't experience symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work and in their personal lives.

We want everyone to feel comfortable talking about menopause, never feeling that the subject is taboo or off limits. This guide is to explain more about menopause and to help you understand what support is available to you.



What is Menopause?

Menopause is defined as a biological stage in a woman's life that occurs when her hormones change and eventually menstruation stops. Usually it is defined as having occurred when they've not had a period for 12 consecutive months (for those reaching menopause naturally). The average menopause age is 51, however it can be earlier naturally or due to surgery, illness or other reasons.

Perimenopause is the time leading up to menopause when they may experience changes and menopausal symptoms. This can be years before menopause.

Postmenopause is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months and for the rest of her life. When we talk about menopause in this guidance, we are referring to any of these stages.

What are the symptoms of menopause?

Hormonal changes can result in a wide range of symptoms, both physical and psychological. In research, the ones women have said affect them most at work include, but are not limited to:

- Difficulty sleeping, insomnia or fatigue
- Hot flushes during the day or night
- Low mood, depression, or changes in mood
- Nervousness, worry or anxiety
- Reduced ability to concentrate or focus
- Problems with memory recall
- Migraines or headaches
- Aches and pains
- Irregular and/or heavy periods
- Urinary issues, e.g. increased frequency

Thinking about long-term health, too

Understanding menopause is more than just being aware of symptoms, it's about long-term health, too. As hormone levels change, we need to take extra care about our wellbeing, in particular heart and bone health.



Managing menopause symptoms and long-term health

Managing menopause is a personal choice. Some prefer a natural approach, others a medical approach, or for some it can be a combination of the two. Benefits, risk, and medical history also need to be taken into account.

Talking to your GP

We always recommend you go to your GP if you're experiencing menopausal symptoms.

They can discuss options with you, including hormone replacement therapy (HRT), and advise on any lifestyle changes which could help. They should also be able to advise you on complementary treatments, including herbal remedies. A little preparation will help you get the best from your appointment (see appendix 2 for top tips).

You could also record your symptoms and detail your menstrual cycle history. GPs use the NICE guidelines to help women manage their menopause - it's a good idea to read through these too.

Research the facts on up-to-date, trusted websites, and think about ways you would like to manage not just your menopause symptoms but your long-term health.

Importance of lifestyle

Current health promotion says a healthy lifestyle can have a positive impact on both menopausal symptoms and long-term health, so it's important to consider lifestyle changes during and after the menopause. These can include:

Healthy eating – research has shown that a balanced diet, with low saturated fat and salt can lower blood pressure and help alleviate some symptoms. Also eating foods containing calcium and vitamin D to help keep bones healthy.

Exercising regularly – exercise can help to manage symptoms, reduce hot flushes and improve sleep. It can also help boost mood and maintain strong bones.

Manage stress levels - getting adequate rest and relaxation. This can help balance hormones, reduce symptoms and improve long-term health. It's a personal choice how you do this, whether it's yoga, mindfulness, going for a walk or just taking time out.

Stay hydrated - always important and drinking plenty of water, particularly chilled water, can help with hot flushes.

Cutting down caffeine and alcohol - avoiding 'triggers', including certain food and drinks such as coffee, alcohol or even spicy food for some. Keep a diary to understand what your triggers might be to avoid them e.g. prior to going into a presentation or meetings could help to avoid potential is comfort. Alcohol can also increase hot flushes and can lead to an increased risk of developing breast cancer.

Improving your sleep - looking at ways to try to reduce sleep disruption, such as fans, bedding made of natural materials, and pillow coolers.

Not smoking - smoking has been shown to lead to an earlier menopause and trigger hot flushes. It can also bring a higher risk of developing osteoporosis and Coronary Heart Disease (CHD), which is the most common form of death in women.

Staying calm and positive - hormone imbalance during the menopause can result in added stress and even depression. Relaxation techniques and counselling can be very helpful in coping with anxiety. Research also supports the benefits of using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to manage symptoms.

Enjoy the outdoors - having access to natural light (where possible), or using a desk daylight lamp as an alternative, and following the NHS recommendation of taking vitamin D.

Using technology - where available and helpful, such as for setting reminders and 'to do' lists.





Talking about the menopause

Some people can find it difficult to talk about their menopause. It can be a deeply personal topic, and some may find it embarrassing talking about their menopausal symptoms. Some may think of it as a personal matter and nothing to do with work.

It's important for you to understand about menopause and be prepared to talk about it, whether that's with your GP, your line manager, partners, friends and family. For all, preparation is important and included in this pack are top tips to help you. This will result in a much better conversation and outcome. Please see the video on RIBA's staff intranet.





Support for managing your menopause

We treat all conversations seriously and in complete confidence. If you feel that menopausal symptoms are negatively affecting you at work, then it's important to seek support.

Your GP	We would always recommend you visit your GP if you're experiencing menopausal symptoms or want to discuss long-term health. GP's can give advice on medical options, including HRT or other approaches to managing your menopause such as diet and lifestyle changes. See top-tips for preparing for this conversation in the video, and appendices.
Line manager, colleagues, and support groups	Your line manager will be getting some guidance to support you. RIBA Balance can also act as peer support. Reach out to colleagues who may be going through similar and consider forming an informal support group.
Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)	Provided by Health Assured, this confidential Health & Wellbeing service helps colleagues deal with a wide range of personal and work-related problems. To learn more about the services available, visit https://healthassuredeap.co.uk and login by entering Username: RIBA, Password: EAP, or you can call them 24 hours a day, 365 days a year 0800 030 5182
Occupational Health	If needed, your line manager may refer you to our Occupational Health provider, you can talk to HR too about a referral.
My Menopause App balance	https://www.menopausedoctor.co.uk/resources/the-balance-app This free app has been developed by Dr Louise Newson, a leading menopause doctor, to help you track your symptoms and understand more what's happening.



Managing your menopause 3-stage process

Stage 1

- Be clear about how menopause is affecting you.
- What symptoms are you experiencing and when?
- Which are your worst symptoms
- Prioritise what you want to focus on.
- This is the basis for deciding how you want to manage your symptoms and helps with getting the right support.

Stage 2

- Focus on your personal philosophy for managing menopause.
- This is your unique journey, there is no right answer there is just a right answer for you.
- You may also want to combine more than one approach and your philosophy may change over time.

Stage 3

- What action are you going to take?
- What support do you need?



Symptoms

0 = No problem 1 = Mild 2 = Severe 3 = Extremely severe

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

0 1 2 3

Hot flushes / Night sweats

Sleep problems

Skin (dryness, itching or acne)

Aching joints

Weight gain or bloating

Fatigue

Heart palpitations

Changes in periods

Breast tenderness

UTI, urinary frequency & leakage

PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS

Worry or anxiety

Lower self confidence

Mood swings

Memory problems

Low mood or depression

Panic attacks

Easily tearful

Decreased ability to concentrate

Brain fog

Inability to multitask

Stage 1:

- What are your symptoms?
 - Prioritise the top 3 or 4
 - How do they affect you at home and at work?
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Stage 2:

- What is your personal philosophy to manage symptoms and long-term health?
 - Do you prefer the medical, complementary or lifestyle approach, or a combination?
 - Decide who you are going to talk to and when.
 - Establish who can help you at home and at work.
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Stage 3:

What do you plan to do:

- Learn more about menopause (if you need to)?
 - Manage your symptoms and long-term health?
 - Who are you going to talk to? And by when?
 - Who can help you (at work, at home)?
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Appendix 1

Talking to your line manager or trusted colleague about menopause:

Research tells us that some women can find it hard to talk to their manager about how menopause is affecting them. However, your manager is there to help you be at your best at work. To help you both, preparation is important. This will result in a much better conversation and outcome for both you and your employer.

Prepare for your meeting - Check what support is available on the intranet or talk to HR.

Keep a diary of your menopause symptoms and how they're affecting you. Think about what practical, reasonable adjustments might help, being flexible and ideally coming up with some different options. These may be for a short period of time while you work with your medical professional to alleviate your symptoms.

Booking a meeting - This means you'll have time and ideally a private office to talk and will be more likely to get your points across.

Explain your situation clearly - Talk about how menopause is affecting you at work, what you're doing to manage your menopause and what your line manager could do to help. Discuss what support you would like e.g. reasonable adjustments and timescales. Or sometimes just knowing someone understands and is there to listen can help.

Agree with your manager what you can both do. They may need time to think about the best support. Remember, this may have been on your mind for a long time, but it may be the first time your manager has heard about it. Allow them time to digest the information and seek advice if necessary.

Do you want the conversation to be confidential? Some of us are happy talking about menopause openly, others are not. Talk to your line manager about whether you want the conversation to be kept confidential or if you're happy to discuss it with colleagues. It's your choice.

Follow up - At the end of the meeting put a time in the diary to meet again, whether that's to agree away forward, to monitor progress or update. Menopause symptoms can change over time. Above all, it's in both your best interests to find a good solution. All anyone wants is for you to be fit and well and do your job to the best of your ability. Menopause can be isolating if you don't talk to someone but remember all women go through menopause at some point, so you most certainly are not alone.

Appendix 2

Talking to your GP about menopause:

If menopausal symptoms are getting in the way of you enjoying life, it's time to talk to your doctor. Here are some helpful, straightforward tips to help you get the best from your appointment.

Don't wait until symptoms feel unbearable - Often women feel they must 'put up' with menopausal symptoms, but if they are affecting you then there are things you can do and support available.

Read the NICE guidelines - The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines are used by your doctor to determine the type of conversations to have with you and treatments to offer. The guidelines for patients are really useful to read before you see your GP so you know what to expect. (See Appendix 3)

Prepare for your appointment - Keep a list of your symptoms, your menstrual cycle, hot flushes, how you're feeling, any changes you've noticed. Write them down and take them to your appointment.

If you have any preferences about how you manage symptoms tell them that too e.g. if you'd like to try hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or not. Your doctor will thank you for it and it's more likely that together you'll find the right solution faster.

Ask the receptionist which doctor is best to talk to about menopause - It might not be your usual GP, it could be someone who has had special training in the subject.

Ask for a longer appointment if you think you need it - Some surgeries will do this.

Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion - if you don't feel you've received the help you need. Don't be put off, you know how you're feeling and how it's affecting you.

Ask if there is a menopause clinic in your area - If there is and you think this would be helpful, ask for a referral.

Take your partner or a friend with you - They will know how the symptoms are affecting you, could support you at the appointment and also find out how to continue supporting you.

Remember, your GP is there to help and support you, and you should feel comfortable and confident in talking to them about your symptoms and what kind of help you need.

Appendix 3

Where more help and advice is available:

Relevant RIBA company policies	Menopause guidance documents can be found in RIBA's staff intranet. Flexible Working Policy Sickness Absence Policy
NHS menopause information	The NHS website has lots of information, visit: http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Menopause/Pages/Introduction.aspx .
Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG)	RCOG offer further information in a dedicated area of their website at: https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/menopause/
National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines	The NICE guidelines explain how GP's determine what types of treatments and interventions they can offer. Visit https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/About-this-information
Early menopause	Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) information and support on very early menopause. Visit https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk
Hysterectomies, oophorectomy information	For comprehensive information about hysterectomy, visit: https://www.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/hysterectomy
Women's stories	For more information on managing the menopause and an insight into women's stories, visit the Henpicked website at https://henpicked.net/menopause-hub



More help and advice

National Institute of Medicinal Herbalists: here's a link to find a qualified medical herbalist in your area: <https://www.nimh.org.uk/find-a-herbalist/>

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and menopause: <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/cognitive-behaviour-therapy-cbt-menopausal-symptoms/>

Rebecca's review on CBT: <https://henpicked.net/cognitive-behaviour-therapy-help-menopause/>

Information on hysterectomy: <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/hysterectomy/>

NHS guidelines for taking vitamin D: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitamin-d/>

Complementary/alternative therapies: <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/complementaryalternative-therapies-menopausal-women/>

Books we recommend:

Menopause - the change for the better – Henpicked

Men... Let's Talk Menopause - Ruth Devlin

The one stop guide to menopause - Kathy Abernethy

Older and Wider – Jenny Eclair