Menopause Policy

### 1. Introduction

Aberystwyth University is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for everyone who works here, and this policy applies to all University staff.

This policy sets out the guidelines for supporting staff with menopausal symptoms at work. It is not contractual and does not form part of the terms and conditions of employment – however, if the University wishes to amend the Menopause Policy, staff will be consulted on proposed changes via the recognised Trade Unions.

Menopause isn’t always an easy physical or emotional transition but with the right support the symptoms can be alleviated. Whilst some individuals will not suffer with all of the symptoms, many of the symptoms are frequently not understood to be part of the menopause process, and as such support is frequently patchy or non-existent for colleagues going through this process.

Menopause and other women’s related health matters can all too frequently be labelled as “women’s troubles” and are treated as a source of embarrassment, shame or secrecy, yet with the changing age of the UK’s workforce between 75% and 80% of menopausal women are in work.

Research shows that the majority of individuals are unwilling to discuss menopause-related health problems with their line manager, nor ask for the support or reasonable adjustments that may help. The purpose of this policy is therefore to provide a supportive framework in which individuals can engage with the University to access appropriate and timely support where this is needed.

While this Policy uses the term ‘women’ to talk about people who may experience menopause, we know that it can impact trans or non-binary colleagues who don’t identify as women in the same manner. Men and women may also need support too while their partner is menopausal. We will support all colleagues experiencing menopause. Everyone has different experiences and assumptions should not be made but listen to the individual and support their needs sensitively.

### 2. Aims of the Policy

The aims of this policy are to:

* Creating a culture in which colleagues are comfortable in discussing their support needs with well-informed and supportive colleagues;
* Ensure everyone understands what menopause is, can confidently have constructive conversations, and are clear on the University’s policy and practices, supported by Human Resources and Occupational Health;
* Educate and inform managers about the potential symptoms of menopause, and how they can support women at work;
* Ensure that women suffering with menopausal symptoms feel confident to discuss them, and ask for support and any reasonable adjustments so they can continue to be successful in their roles;
* Instil confidence in individuals who are experiencing menopause related health and wellbeing issues in self-managing the symptoms through accessing dedicated support and, where appropriate, in raising symptoms with their GP to receive medical advice and support;

### 3. Definitions & Symptoms

**Menopause** is defined by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) as “…as a biological stage in a woman's life that occurs when she stops menstruating and reaches the end of her reproductive life”. Usually, it is defined as having occurred when a woman has not had a period for twelve consecutive months (for women reaching menopause naturally). The average age for a woman to reach menopause is 51 but can be significantly earlier for various reasons.

Whilst not every individual will notice every symptom, or need help or support, most individuals do experience some symptoms, and some could be classed as severe.

The menopause affects individual women’s emotional and physical health differently. Being aware of the basic needs is necessary to support women going through this transition. Symptoms may include:

* Hot flushes
* Palpitations
* Fatigue
* Sleep disturbance
* Night sweats
* Skin irritation
* Irritability
* Mood disturbances
* Poor concentration
* The need for more toilet breaks
* Heavier and/or more irregular periods
* Headaches
* Anxiety
* Loss of confidence

According to a survey of female workers experiencing menopause conducted Research conducted by the University of Nottingham and The British Occupational Health Research Foundation[[1]](#footnote-1), the symptoms most likely to be made worse by work are hot flushes, headaches, tiredness and lack of energy. These were closely followed by sweating, anxiety attacks, aches and pains, dry skin and eyes and short-term memory loss.

### 4. Roles and Responsibilities

#### **Members of staff**

All staff are responsible for:

* Taking a personal responsibility to look after their health;
* Being open and honest in conversations with managers/HR and Occupational Health;
* Speaking to their line manage HR (via hrbp@aber.ac.uk) or their Union where they wish to discuss the support available;
* Contributing to a respectful and productive working environment;
* Being willing to help and support their colleagues;
* Understanding any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.

#### **Line Managers**

All line managers are responsible for:

* Familiarising themselves with the Menopause Policy and Guidance;
* Be ready and willing to have open discussions about menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and professionally;
* Use the guidance in Appendices A and C, signposting and reviewing together, before agreeing with the individual how best they can be supported, and any adjustments required;
* Record adjustments agreed on Appendix B, along with actions to be implemented;
* Refrain from making assumptions but instead listen to the individual’s needs and discuss these sensitively;
* Ensure ongoing dialogue and review dates;
* Ensure that all agreed adjustments are adhered to.

Where adjustments are unsuccessful, or if symptoms are proving more problematic, the Line Manager may:

* Discuss a referral to Occupational Health for further advice;
* Consider Occupational Health advice, and implement any recommendations, where reasonably practical;
* Update and review the action plan on a regular basis.

#### **Occupational Health**

The role of Occupational Health is to:

* Carry out an holistic assessment of individuals as to whether or not menopause may be contributing to symptoms/wellbeing, providing advice and guidance in line with up-to-date research;
* Signpost to appropriate sources of help and advice (refer to Appendix C for more information);
* Provide support and advice to HR and Line Managers in determining and agreeing reasonable adjustments, if required;
* Monitor referrals due to menopause symptoms, and provide additional signposting, where required;
* Review the Menopause Advice Sheet (see Appendix C) and keep this up to date.

#### **Human Resources (HR)**

HR will:

* Be available to offer support and guidance to staff who may not feel comfortable discussing these issues directly with their line-managers;
* Offer guidance to managers on the interpretation of this Policy and Guidance;
* Develop briefing sessions for staff;
* Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this policy;
* Review the policy and guidance with the recognised Trade Unions on a triennial basis.

#### **Employee Assistance**

The Employee Assistance service will:

* Provide access to 24/7 telephone counselling and face-to-face counselling for all members of staff.
* Provide on-line (downloadable) advice sheets via their website (see further links in Appendix C).

###  5. Links to other policies

 This policy is linked to:

* Dignity & Respect at Work;
* Flexible working guidance;
* Health and Wellbeing Strategy;
* Managing Sickness Absence Policy & procedure;
* Capability Policy and Procedure.

### 6. Appendices

* Appendix A – Managers’ Guidance For supportive discussions with staff;
* Appendix B – Confidential Employee Discussion Template;
* Appendix C – Menopause Advice Sheet.

### 7. External links

* All colleagues can access counselling by contacting the University’s Employee Assistance Programme provider directly by telephone on 0800 174 319 or <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hr/employment-information/eap/>
* National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines. These explain how your GP will determine what types of treatments and interventions they can offer you. You can find out more information by using the following link <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/About-this-information>
* The National Health Service provides an overview of menopause. You can find more at <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Menopause/Pages/Introduction.aspx>
* Menopause information. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists offer further information in a dedicated area of their website at: <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/menopause/>
* Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) information and support on very early menopause. You can find out more at https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk.
* Information on hysterectomy. This provides an insight into surgically induced menopause as a result of having a hysterectomy. Further details can be found at <https://www.hysterectomy-association.org.uk>.
* Henpicked. This site provides information on managing menopause, and an insight into women's stories (see <https://henpicked.net/menopause/>).
* Learn more about healthy eating for women
* <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/balanced-diet-women>
* <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/eight-tips-for-healthy-eating/>
* Mindfulness techniques in the workplace:
* <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/how-practising-mindfulness-in-the-workplace-can-boost-productivity/>
* <https://www.mindful.org/10-ways-mindful-work/>
* More info on related women’s health issues such as PMS, PMDD and Endometriosis
* PMS: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pre-menstrual-syndrome/>
* PMDD: [https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/premenstrual-dysphoric-disorder-pmdd/#.W5d64uSWy71](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/premenstrual-dysphoric-disorder-pmdd/)
* Endometriosis UK: <https://www.endometriosis-uk.org/>
* Endometriosis Helpline: 0808 808 2227

## APPENDIX A

### Managers’ Guidance for supportive discussions

We recognise that the impact the menopause and its symptoms may have on each individual is different, and it is, therefore, not feasible to set out a structured set of specific guidelines.

If an employee wishes to speak about their symptoms, talk about how they are feeling, or to talk about their experience of supporting a partner through the transition, please ensure that you:

* Allow adequate time to have the conversation
* Find an appropriate room to preserve confidentiality;
* Encourage them to speak openly and honestly;
* Suggest ways in which they can be supported (see symptoms below) – share the Menopause Advice Sheet (Appendix C);
* Agree actions, and how to implement them (you should use the template at Appendix B to record the meeting, so that all parties agree what has been discussed, and the next steps, before the meeting ends). Ensure that this record is treated as confidential, and is stored securely with HR.
* Agree if other members of the team should be informed, and by whom;
* Ensure that designated time is allowed for a follow up meeting. Do not rely on quick queries during chance encounters in the corridor or non-confidential spaces.

#### Symptoms Support

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically, including, but not exhaustively or exclusively; support for women should be considered as detailed below:

#### Hot Flushes

* Request temperature control for their work area, such as a fan on their desk (where possible a USB connected desk fan to ensure environmentally friendly) or moving near a window, or away from a heat source;
* Easy access to drinking water;
* Be allowed to adapt prescribed uniform, such as by removing a jacket;
* Have access to a rest room for breaks if their work involves long periods of standing or sitting, or a quiet area if they have a short term need to manage a severe hot flush.

#### Heavy/light Periods

* Have easy access to washroom facilities;
* Request an extra uniform;
* Ensure sanitary products are available in washrooms (as marked on a University map)/key points across the University, in order to obtain personal protection;
* Ensure storage space is available for a change of clothing.

#### Headaches

* Have ease of access to fresh drinking water;
* Offer a quiet space to work;
* Offer noise-reducing headphones to wear in open offices;
* Have time out to take medication if needed.

#### Difficulty Sleeping

* Explore whether temporary flexible working arrangements might be suitable, particularly if the individual is suffering from a lack of sleep.

#### Low Mood

* Agree time out from others, when required, without needing to ask for permission;
* Identify a ‘buddy’ for the colleague to talk to – outside of the work area;
* Identify a ‘time out space’ to be able to go to ‘clear their head’;
* Details of the University’s Employee Assistance Programme provider can be accessed through the HR website and can be accessed directly by telephone on 0800 174 319 or <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hr/employment-information/eap/>

#### Loss of Confidence

* Ensure there are regular Effective Contribution Scheme Discussions (ECS) which include support available to refresh emotional wellbeing such as resilience training, etc;
* Have regular protected time with their manager to discuss any issues;
* Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.

#### Poor Concentration

* Discuss if there are times of the day when concentration is better or worse, and adjust working pattern/practice accordingly whilst ensuring necessary work objectives, customer service and reasonable adjustments for colleagues;
* Review task allocation and workload;
* Provide books for lists, action boards, or other memory-assisting equipment;
* Offer quiet space to work;
* Offer noise-reducing headphones to wear in open offices;
* Reduce interruptions;
* Have agreements in place in an open office that an individual is having ‘protected time’, so that they are not disturbed;
* Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.

#### Anxiety

* Promote counselling services provided by the University’s Employee Assistance provider on 0800 174 319 or <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hr/employment-information/eap/>
* Identify a ‘buddy’ for the colleague to talk to – outside of work their area;
* Be able to have time away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques;
* Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk.

#### Panic Attacks

* Agree time out from others, when required, without needing to ask for permission;
* Identify a ‘buddy’ outside of work area;
* Be able to have time away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques;
* Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk.

Discuss whether the member of staff has visited their GP. Depending on the discussion, this may be the next step suggested, particularly if the areas of difficulty are sleeping, panic attacks or anxiety. If they have visited their GP, and are being supported by them, it may be helpful at this point to make an Occupational Health referral to give specific advice regarding the workplace.

## APPENDIX B

**Confidential Colleague Discussion**

**Member of staff - details:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name |  |
| Job Title |  |
| Department |  |
| Location |  |
| Present at meeting |  |
| Date of discussion |  |

**Summary of Discussion:**

|  |
| --- |
|   |

**Agreed Actions/Adjustments:**

|  |
| --- |
|   |

**Date of next review meeting**:.……………..................................................................

**Signed (Member of staff):** ...................................................................................

**Signed (Manager):** ..............................................................................................

## APPENDIX C

### Menopause Advice Sheet

#### How to talk to your GP about menopause

If you are suffering from menopausal symptoms to the point they’re getting in the way of you enjoying life, it’s time to talk to your doctor. But, sometimes, that’s easier said than done.

We all know how difficult it can often be just to get an appointment, and then it’s often only ten minutes. And talking about symptoms can be hard, let alone if you feel rushed or unprepared. So, what can you do? We’ve put together some helpful, straightforward tips to help you get the best from your appointment.

Don’t wait. It is all too common for women to feel they must simply ‘put up’ with menopausal symptoms as a part of life, but if they are affecting you, there are things you can do, and support available. There is no need to wait until symptoms feel unbearable.

Read the NICE guidelines. This stands for National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and these guidelines are what your doctor will use to determine the type of conversations to have with you and treatments to offer. There are guidelines for patients, which are useful to read before you see your GP, so you know what to expect.

Prepare for your appointment. It’s easier for your doctor to understand what’s going on if you provide them with all the information. That may sound obvious, but blood tests to say where you are on the menopause transition aren’t always available or accurate – your hormones can fluctuate daily during this time. So, your doctor will be thinking about what to recommend for you, based on your symptoms.

Keep a list of your symptoms, your menstrual cycle, hot flushes, how you’re feeling, and any changes you’ve noticed. Write them down and take them to your appointment. Your doctor will thank you for it, and it’s more likely that together, you’ll find the right solution faster. And, if you have any preferences about how you manage your symptoms, tell them that too – for example, if you’d like to try hormone replacement therapy (HRT), or not.

Ask the receptionist which doctor is best to talk to about menopause. They can help you find the best person to speak to – 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 don’t think your standard appointment will be long enough, try to book a double appointment, as some surgeries do offer this.

Don’t be afraid to ask for a second opinion. If you don’t feel you’ve received the help you need, ask to speak to someone else. Don’t be put off, you know how you’re feeling, and how it’s affecting you.

Take your partner or a friend with you. The chances are, you spend your life supporting others and, during menopause, it’s your turn to ask them for support. Your partner, or a friend, will know how the symptoms are affecting you. They could support you at the appointment, and also find out how they can continue supporting you.

#### What to expect from your doctor

There are certain things a GP should – and should not – do during your appointment.

They should:

* Talk to you about your lifestyle, and how to manage both your symptoms, and your longer-term health;
* Offer advice on hormone replacement therapy and other non-medical options;
* Talk to you about the safety and effectiveness of any treatment.

They should not:

* Tell you that it’s just that time of your life. Yes, menopause is a natural stage, but please don’t feel that means you should have to put up with every symptom without help;
* Tell you they don’t prescribe HRT. It’s up to you what you want to try, and for them to say whether it could be right for you, depending on your medical history;
* Impose unnecessary time restrictions, such as they will only prescribe this once, or for a year or two. This is an ongoing conversation, and if your symptoms persist, you will still need help to manage them.

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 any help you need. Don’t think you have to struggle through menopause when there is help and support available.

All staff can access counselling by contacting the University’s Employee Assistance Programme provider on 0800 174 319 or <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hr/employment-information/eap/>

Reviewed 20 August 2020

1. GRIFFITHS, A., MACLENNAN, S & WONG, Y.Y.V., 2010. [Work and the Menopause: A Guide for Managers](http://www.bohrf.org.uk/downloads/Work_and_the_Menopause-A_Guide_for_Managers.pdf), London: British Occupational Health Research Foundation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)