

University of Aberdeen

Menopause Policy - Staff and Students

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 The University of Aberdeen, in line with its strategic plan Aberdeen 2040, is committed to creating positive and inclusive working and learning environments. The University will care for the wellbeing, health and safety of our diverse community, supporting and developing our people to achieve their full potential.
- 1.2 The University aims to raise awareness of the menopause, its symptoms, and the impact it can have on work and study. The University endeavours to create environments where staff and students feel confident to raise issues about their menopause symptoms and to ask for support. Managers/student support staff will be empowered to provide the appropriate help and advice.
- 1.3 The changing age of the UK's workforce means that between 75% and 80% of individuals experiencing menopause are in work. Research shows that staff are unwilling to discuss menopause-related health problems with their line manager, or to ask for the support or adjustments that they may need.
- 1.4 This Policy provides guidance for members of staff, managers, students and those who support them on providing the right support to manage menopausal symptoms at work and University.

2. Principles

- Staff and students experiencing the menopause will be treated fairly and with dignity and respect.
- To raise awareness across the University community of menopause-related issues at work and study.
- Managers/student support staff will be assisted in supporting staff and students who are experiencing menopause and associated symptoms and enable them to access the support they need.
- Staff and students should be encouraged to openly and comfortably instigate conversations or engage in discussions about menopause.
- Information about the menopause and the University's policies and practices will be freely available and accessible at the University.
- Confidential conversations on menopause should be supported.

- Managers will be informed about the potential symptoms of menopause, and how they can support staff at work.
- Personal tutors will be informed about the potential symptoms of the menopause and how they can support students with their studies.
- Staff and students will be enabled to attend work and university and contribute their best whilst experiencing menopausal symptoms.

3. Scope

3.1 This policy applies to all University staff and students.

4. Definitions

4.1 **Menopause** is when periods stop (for 12 months), and the end of the natural reproductive life is reached. Menopause usually occurs between the ages of 39 and 59 with the average being 51 in the UK, however, it can be earlier due to surgery, illness or other reasons. The symptoms typically last for 4 years but can last up to 12 years.

4.2 **Perimenopause** is the time leading up to menopause when changes may be experienced, and sometimes severe associated menopausal symptoms begin. Perimenopause can occur years before menopause and is often when most support is required.

4.3 **Post menopause** is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when there has not been a period for twelve consecutive months.

5. Symptoms of Menopause

5.1 Not every individual will have every symptom or need help or support. However, 75% of those affected do experience some symptoms, and 25% of those symptoms could be classed as severe.

5.2 Typical symptoms of menopause include:

- Psychological issues such as mood disturbances, anxiety and/or depression, memory loss, panic attacks, loss of confidence and reduced concentration
- Sleeplessness
- Fatigue
- Hot flushes (sudden surges of heat usually felt in the face, neck and chest)
- Night sweats (hot flushes that happen during the night)
- Irregular periods and/or bleeding that is very heavy and unpredictable
- Muscle and joint stiffness, aches and pains
- Recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- Headaches
- Weight gain

- Palpitations (heartbeats that become more noticeable)
 - Skin changes (dryness, acne, general itchiness)
- 5.3 The University recognises that menopause is experienced differently by individuals and therefore the impact of the menopause may differ greatly for each person. Individuals who identify themselves as non-binary, transgender or from intersex communities may experience menopausal symptoms, and their menopause may be different.
- 5.4 The menopause is a natural part of life; however it is not always an easy transition. The University recognises that appropriate support can help the individual to manage this transition. Whilst not everyone experiences symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work and study.

6. Responsibilities

- 6.1 It is important that everyone understands what menopause is, and to be able to talk about it openly, without embarrassment. Menopause should not be taboo or 'hidden'. This is not just an issue for those who experience the menopause, all staff and students should be aware of the potential impact of the menopause.

6.2 Staff

All members of staff will be encouraged to:

- Take personal responsibility for their health and wellbeing, seeking medical advice if necessary to support self-management, with support from the University, managers and colleagues, to help manage symptoms
 - Be open about how the menopause is impacting on them in conversations with managers/HR and Occupational Health. This will enable appropriate support and guidance to be provided
 - Contribute to a respectful and productive working environment
 - Be willing to support their colleagues
 - Be understanding of necessary adjustments/changes at work which have been agreed to support their colleagues as a result of their menopausal symptoms
- 6.3 If a member of staff prefers to speak to someone other than their line manager, they may choose to speak to another line manager (may be outwith their team) or to HR, the Wellbeing Team or their union representative.

6.4 Line Managers (see Appendix 1 for Managers' Guidance)

Line managers are responsible for:

- Familiarising themselves with the Menopause Policy and Guidance
- Being prepared to have discussions about menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation and treating it sensitively and professionally

- Considering, with the member of staff, how best they can be supported including discussing any requests to accommodate changes at work that may be helpful to manage symptoms
- Ensuring ongoing dialogue and review dates
- Ensuring that agreed actions are implemented
- Where changes at work/agreed adjustments are accommodated but are unsuccessful or if symptoms are proving more problematic, the line manager may:
 - Discuss a referral to Occupational Health (OH) for further advice
 - Refer the member of staff to Occupational Health
 - Review Occupational Health advice and implement recommendations where reasonably practicable
 - Update the actions agreed as part of any discussion and continue to review - please refer to Appendix 1a
 - Consider temporary changes to the work environment or working arrangements
 - In accordance with the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) and National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines, best practice advice indicates that the staff member should be advised to seek medical advice from their GP in the first instance. However, an OH referral can still be made even if the staff member has not discussed this with their GP.

6.5 All students are encouraged to:

- Take personal responsibility for their health and wellbeing, seeking medical advice if necessary to support self-management, with support from the University, to help manage symptoms
- Be open about how the menopause is impacting on them in conversations with student support and personal tutors. This will enable appropriate support and guidance to be provided
- Contribute to a respectful and productive learning environment
- Be willing to support their peers
- Be understanding of necessary adjustments/changes at university which have been agreed to support their classmates as a result of their menopausal symptoms

6.6 Occupational Health

The role of Occupational Health is to:

- Carry out a holistic assessment of individuals as to whether or not menopause may be contributing to symptoms/wellbeing, providing advice and guidance in line with latest research
- Signpost staff and managers to appropriate sources of help and advice (refer to Appendix 2 for more information)

- Provide support and advice to HR and Line Managers in determining and agreeing reasonable adjustments/changes at work, if required
- Monitor referrals due to menopause symptoms, and provide additional signposting, where required

6.7 Human Resources (HR)

HR will:

- Offer guidance to managers on the interpretation of this Policy and Guidance;
- Provide guidance to staff who have approached HR directly
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this Policy

6.8 Student Support

Student Support will:

- Offer support and recommend reasonable adjustments for learning if required.
- Review adjustments as required with the student.
- Signpost students to appropriate sources of help and advice (refer to Appendix 2 for more information)

7. Examples of support or adjustments

Some possible support or adjustments may include:

7.1 Flexible working arrangements

Consideration of the following for those experiencing severe symptoms:

- Where the role permits, allow staff to work around their symptoms
- Allowing time to rest and make the time up later
- Permitting occasional/additional home working when symptoms are severe
- Adjusting start and finish times
- Flexibility around the taking of breaks or increased breaks during the working day
- Flexibility around attending relevant medical appointments
- Easy access to changing/washing facilities
- Allowing regular breaks during meetings, especially longer meetings
- Possible extensions to student assignments

7.2 Working environment

Consideration of the following:

- Facilitating a more comfortable working environment taking into account heating and lighting
- Making desk fans easily available
- Reviewing whether ventilation is sufficient or can be improved

- Consideration of the proximity of washrooms
- Use of campus prayer/contemplation facilities as quiet space

7.3 Uniforms

Consideration of the following:

- Where uniforms are provided consider natural fibres where possible
- Provision of additional uniforms
- Adjustment of uniform requirements

7.4 The University recognises that the menopause can be perceived differently by our diverse communities. Considering an individual in their own circumstances and supporting them according to their particular needs is good practice.

8. Sources of Additional Support

- [Human Resources](#)
- [Wellbeing Team](#)
- [Mental Health First Aid Advisers \(MHFAs\)](#)
- [Workplace Dignity Network](#)
- [Multi-Faith Chaplaincy](#)
- [Trade Unions](#)
- [Employee Assistance Programme](#) - provides access to 24/7 telephone counselling for all members of staff
- [Student Helpline](#) - provides free-of-charge immediate emotional support as well as information and advice on a range of 'life' and wellbeing matters.
- [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
- The National Health Service provides [an overview of menopause](#)
- The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists offer [dedicated menopause information](#)
- [Premature Ovarian Insufficiency \(POI\) information and support on very early menopause](#)
- [NHS information on hysterectomy](#). This provides an insight into surgically induced menopause as a result of having a hysterectomy.
- A Government Report '[The effects of menopause transition on women's economic participation in the UK](#)' July 2017 lead author Joanna Brewis, researched by the University of Leicester
- [Henpicked](#). This site provides information on managing menopause, and an insight into women's stories
- [Menopausematters](#)
- [Rock My Menopause](#)

9. Related policies and guidance

This policy is linked to:

- Dignity at Work and Study Toolkit (awaiting approval);
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy;
- Flexible Working Guidance;
- Staff and Student Wellbeing Strategy
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy
- Sickness Absence Management Procedure
- Management of Work-Related Stress Policy

10. Appendices

Appendix 1 Managers' Guidance For Staff Discussions about the menopause

This details recommendations to support symptomatic staff who may need advice and support.

Appendix 1a Confidential Staff Discussion Template - Blank

This template is to assist managers in recording conversations, and agreed actions and adjustments, with members of staff.

Appendix 1b Confidential Staff Discussion Template – Example

This template has some suggestions for the questions to ask and type of information to record on it.

Appendix 2 Menopause Advice Sheet

A guide for staff and students on how to have constructive conversations about menopause with their doctor.

Approved 1 November 2022

Managers' Guidance For Discussions With Staff

This guidance sets out key suggestions about how to manage conversations with staff about menopause. It provides information on the common symptoms of menopause, how they can impact in the workplace and suggestions for supporting staff experiencing these symptoms.

It is important to recognise that for many reasons the impact of the menopause may differ greatly for individuals. People who identify themselves as non-binary, transgender or from intersex communities may experience menopausal symptoms, and their menopause may be different.

We also understand that the menopause can be perceived differently by our diverse communities. The key is to always consider an individual in their own circumstances and support them according to their particular needs.

If a member of staff wishes to talk about their symptoms, or just to talk about how they are feeling (they may not recognise themselves that they are symptomatic), or if a staff member wishes to talk about a family member that they are supporting and how this is impacting on them, 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;
- Ask the member of staff what would be helpful to them and if appropriate suggest ways in which they could be supported (see symptoms below) –
- Refer to the Menopause Advice Sheet (Appendix 2);
- Agree actions, and how to implement them (you should use the template at Appendix 1a 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.
- Agree if other members of the team should be informed, and by whom;
- Ensure that designated time is allowed for a follow up meeting.

(Note – for advice about supporting a member of staff absent with menopause symptoms please contact you HR Adviser)

Menopause Symptom Support

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 (OH) referral to give specific advice regarding the workplace. If the staff member discusses symptoms which are impacting on their ability to undertake their role, a referral to Occupational Health can

be made to ascertain whether the member of staff is fit for work or if there are workplace adjustments which can be implemented to support them at work. (An OH referral may still be made even if the staff member has not consulted their GP, however best practice is to advise staff to contact their GP in the first instance.)

Managers are not expected to know everything about the menopause, but the following table provides some suggestions about how some of the common symptoms might be managed/supported/mitigated.

Menopause symptoms may be both physical and psychological, and the following table suggests some possible adjustments but is not exhaustive. For further guidance on reasonable adjustments please contact your HR Adviser.

Menopause Symptom	Potential impact at work	Suggested adjustments
Daytime sweats and flushes (Hot flushes)	Less tolerant of workplace temperatures; workwear/ uniform may become uncomfortable; personal protective equipment (PPE), for example, face masks/visors may be uncomfortable if worn for long periods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy access to supply of cold drinking water • Easy access to washroom facilities. • Avoid nylon or close-fitting uniforms • Where possible adapt uniform, e.g. by removing a jacket; • Look at ways to cool the working environment for staff affected, for example fans at workstations; move desks to near windows/open windows or away from a heat source and adjust air conditioning. • Have access to a rest room for breaks if their work involves long periods of standing or sitting, or a quiet area if they need to manage a severe hot flush. • Where possible limit the time wearing PPE.
Night-time sweats and flushes	Fatigue at work due to lack of sleep.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signpost to advice on improving sleep • Consider temporary adjustment of shift patterns to accommodate any difficulties. • Allow for flexible working. • Recognise potential need for sickness absence.
Difficulty sleeping	Fatigue at work due to lack of sleep (maybe compounded if shift work is carried out).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider temporary adjustment of shift patterns to accommodate any difficulties. • Allow for flexible working. • Recognise potential problem of increased absence in sickness absence policy
Urogenital problems, for example increased frequency, urgency to go to the toilet	Need to access toilet facilities more frequently; may need to drink more fluids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy access to toilet and washroom facilities. • Allow for more frequent breaks in work to go to toilet. • Easy access to supply of cold drinking water.
Irregular/Heavy periods	Need to access toilet and washroom facilities more frequently.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy access to toilet and washroom facilities. • Allow for more frequent breaks in work to go to the toilet. • Request an extra uniform; • Ensure sanitary products are available in washrooms (as marked on a University

		<p>map)/key points across the University, in order to obtain personal protection;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide storage space for a change of clothing
Headaches	Poor concentration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy access to 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.
Low Mood	Certain tasks may become more difficult to carry out temporarily for example learning new skills (may be compounded by lack of sleep and fatigue); performance may be affected; work-related stress may exacerbate these symptoms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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'; • Suggest they contact the University's Employee Assistance Programme for support
Loss of Confidence	Certain tasks may become more difficult to carry out temporarily for example learning new skills (may be compounded by lack of sleep and fatigue); performance may be affected; work-related stress may exacerbate these symptoms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure there are regular Personal Development Discussions; • Have regular protected time with their manager to discuss any issues; • Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.
Poor Concentration	Certain tasks may become more difficult to carry out temporarily for example learning new skills (may be compounded by lack of sleep and fatigue); performance may be affected; work-related stress may exacerbate these symptoms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss if there are times of the day when concentration is better or worse, and adjust working pattern/practice accordingly; • 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	Certain tasks may become more difficult to carry out temporarily for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote counselling services provided by the University's Employee Assistance programme

	example learning new skills (may be compounded by lack of sleep and fatigue); performance may be affected; work-related stress may exacerbate these symptoms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	Certain tasks may become more difficult to carry out temporarily for example learning new skills (may be compounded by lack of sleep and fatigue); performance may be affected; work-related stress may exacerbate these symptoms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
Loss of confidence; forgetfulness/ memory loss; difficulty concentrating; change in mood	Certain tasks may become more difficult to carry out temporarily for example learning new skills (may be compounded by lack of sleep and fatigue); performance may be affected; work-related stress may exacerbate these symptoms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage employee to discuss concerns openly at one-to-one meetings with manager or occupational health and negotiate possible adjustments. • Provide access to counselling services. • Address work related stress through risk assessment and implementation of the HSE's management standards
General itchiness	Uniforms may become uncomfortable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid nylon uniforms. • Comfortable working temperatures
Muscular aches and bone and joint pain	Moving and handling or adopting static postures may be more uncomfortable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make any necessary temporary adjustments through review of risk assessments and work schedules.
Weight gain	Uniform may become uncomfortable; difficulties with mobility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote physical wellbeing at work through wellbeing initiatives.
Psychosocial and social impact	May feel isolated from work colleagues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote physical and mental wellbeing at work. • Provide access to counselling through EAP. • Provide ability to network with colleagues experiencing similar issues

Confidential Staff Discussion – Template

Please read Appendix 1 Managers' Guidance before completing this form

Employee's Name		Job Title	
School/Section		Location of Work	
Line Managers Name and Position:			
Date of discussion:			

Summary of Discussion:

Agreed Actions/Adjustments:

Date of next review meeting.....

Signed (Member of staff).....

Signed (Manager)

Confidential Staff Discussion – Template Example

Please read Appendix 1 Managers’ Guidance before completing this form

Employee’s Name		Job Title	
School/Section		Location of Work	
Line Managers Name and Position:			
Date of discussion:			

Summary of Discussion:

What was discussed? E.g. Health, symptoms, impact on staff member, impact at work.

Issues to be addressed? (Please refer to Appendix 1 for information on possible symptoms and suggested adjustments)

Ask the staff member what would be helpful to them

Potential adjustments discussed

Agreed Actions/Adjustments:

Record agreed actions and how to/who will implement them

Agree next steps

Agree if other members of the team should be informed and by whom

Agree when next review meeting will be

Any other comments

Date of next review meeting.....

Signed (Member of staff).....

Signed (Manager)

Menopause Advice Sheet – Talking to your GP about menopause

If you are experiencing menopausal symptoms which are long-term, difficult to manage, stop you enjoying life or affecting you in other ways, the University would encourage you to discuss this with your doctor as soon as possible.

It can be challenging to talk about your symptoms. The tips below may help you to prepare for your appointment.

How to prepare for your appointment

It will be easier for your doctor to understand the impact of your symptoms if you provide them with all the relevant information. Your doctor will be thinking about what to recommend for you, based on what you tell them. Your doctor may use other indications such as blood tests which show where you are on the menopause transition, to decide what is best for you. However these are not always available or accurate as hormones can fluctuate daily during this time.

Keep a List

It may be helpful to keep a list of your symptoms, your menstrual cycle, hot flushes, how you're feeling, and any changes you've noticed and take this to your appointment. This should help you and your doctor to find the right solution faster. If you have any preferences about how you manage your symptoms, for example, if you'd like to try hormone replacement therapy (HRT), or not, tell your doctor.

Research

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines [Overview | Menopause: diagnosis and management | Guidance | NICE](#). are guidelines for patients .Your doctor may also use these guidelines to determine the conversations to have with you and treatments to offer. You may find it useful to read these guidelines before you see your doctor, so that you know what to expect.

It may be helpful to ask the receptionist at your GP Practice who is the best doctor to consult about the menopause. There may be a doctor who has had special training in the subject but not your usual GP.

It may be helpful to ask for a longer appointment or 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.

There is a Menopause clinic at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and if you think this would be helpful you should discuss a referral to the clinic with your GP.

You could consider taking your partner or a friend with you. They will know how the symptoms are affecting you and could support you at the appointment and find out how they can continue supporting you.

What will happen at the Doctor's appointment

Your doctor will probably:

- Talk to you about your lifestyle, and how to manage both your menopause 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.

Your doctor is there to help and support you, and hopefully you will feel comfortable and confident in talking to them about your symptoms, and any help you need. There is help and support available. Don't think you have to struggle through the menopause.

Further Advice

Employee Assistance helpline [Human Resources | StaffNet | The University of Aberdeen \(abdn.ac.uk\)](#)

Student Helpline - [Support Services | StaffNet | The University of Aberdeen \(abdn.ac.uk\)](#)

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>

Information on hysterectomy. This provides an insight into surgically induced menopause as a result of having a hysterectomy. Further details can be found at: www.nhs.uk/conditions/hysterectomy

A **Government Report** 'The effects of menopause transition on women's economic participation in the UK' July 2017 lead author Joanna Brewis, researched by the University of Leicester was published. [Menopause transition: effects on women's economic participation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/624212/menopause-transition-effects-on-women-economic-participation-2017.pdf)

Henpicked. This site provides information on managing menopause, and an insight into women's stories see <https://henpicked.net/menopause/>

Menopause Matters www.menopausematters.co.uk

Rock My Menopause www.rockmymenopause.com/

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