

Menopause Procedure

Issue: October 2026

Document information

Document title	Menopause Policy		
Owner	Human Resources - Schools		
Version	3.0	Status	Final
Effective from	1 October 2026	Review date	1 February 2027
Last updated by	HR Schools/KS		
Purpose	Provide guidance to Schools and Academies on how to support staff experiencing the effects of the menopause.		

Document accessibility

If you would like this information in another language or format please speak to your Head Teacher.

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This procedure applies to all permanent, fixed term and temporary school/academy based employees, it does not apply to contractors, external consultants or agency staff. A copy of the procedure is available to all staff.
- 1.2 It is important that suitable rules and procedures are in place within schools and academies which will promote fairness and consistency in the treatment of individual employees and which reflect both the relevant policy on equal opportunities and legislation on the avoidance of discrimination.
- 1.3 This procedure is primarily concerned to support schools and academies in providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for all its employees and this policy aims to raise awareness of menopause, ensure employees understand what the menopause is and to provide support to those experiencing menopausal symptoms.
- 1.6 Advice may be sought from your Human Resources Advisor.
- 1.7 The procedure has been implemented following consultation with the Joint Negotiating Committee for Schools and Academies (Schools and Academies JNC) (including representatives from the recognised school and academy unions) and may be amended from time following further consultation.

2. Scope of Procedure

- 2.1 This policy applies to all school/academy employees.
- 2.2 This policy does not apply to contractors, consultants or any self-employed individuals working for the school/academy.
- 2.3 This policy does not apply to casual workers and agency workers, although any reasonable adjustments required for agency workers will need to be discussed collaboratively with the agency.

3. Definition

- 3.1 **Menopause** - A biological stage in a woman's life that occurs when she stops menstruating as a result of a significant change in hormone levels (that can dramatically affect physical changes and physiological wellbeing). Usually considered as having occurred when someone has not had a period for twelve consecutive months (for people reaching menopause naturally). The menopause is a natural part of ageing that usually occurs between 45-55 years of age, although can happen earlier or later than this (when menopause happens before the age of 45 it is normally known as early menopause). The menopause is not usually an abrupt occurrence and symptoms can last for several years either side of the menopause.
- 3.2 **Perimenopause** - The time leading up to menopause when a woman may experience fluctuating hormone levels which can affect physical, emotional and cognitive function.

Menopausal symptoms can be severe for many years, lasting on average seven years before reaching the menopause stage.

- 3.3 Premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency** - When the menopause occurs before the age of 40 years, it is normally known as 'premature menopause' or 'premature ovarian insufficiency'. Some individuals experience the menopause early, but temporarily, when it is medically induced (e.g. as part of a treatment plan for gynecological conditions). In some cases, menopause may be abrupt and permanent as a result of surgery, or treatment for some medical conditions (e.g. breast cancer).
- 3.4 Postmenopause** - The time after menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not had a period for twelve consecutive months.

4.0 Principles

- 4.1 It is important to recognise that menopause is a very individual experience and that people can be affected in different ways and to different degrees, not all will have menopausal symptoms and others will be severely affected by them. Symptoms will vary in type, amount and severity, therefore different and varying levels of support and adjustments may be needed each case should be considered on an individual basis taking into account any protected characteristics. Severe menopausal symptoms may combine to have a substantial adverse effect on normal day to day activities and as such potentially meeting the legal definition of a disability under the Equality Act requiring reasonable adjustments. It is important to note that the menopause is not automatically classed as a disability; it depends on how it affects the individual at that stage in their life.
- 4.2 Whilst menopause is often thought of as a female condition, this policy is aimed at all those individuals who in some form or another may experience menopausal symptoms, including those individuals from non-binary and transgender communities.
- 4.3 Any absence relating to menopausal symptoms will be managed sensitively in accordance with the sickness absence policy, including the use of reasonable adjustments where applicable.
- 4.4 Where symptoms are severe enough to be impacting on the individual's health and well-being at work and affecting their capability to carry out their role, managers should refer to their HR Advisor for further advice. It may ultimately be appropriate to consider managing the situation through an alternative policy, such as performance and ill health capability, where in line with OH advice redeployment may be considered in cases where due to the service requirements it is not possible to make adjustments or where reasonable adjustments implemented through this policy have not achieved the required and / or sustained outcomes.
- 4.5 Employees are encouraged to discuss their menopausal symptoms with their line manager in the first instance as they are best placed to provide support, review risk assessments and consider any adjustments required. However, where an employee feels uncomfortable to have this conversation with their manager, they can contact an alternative manager, liaise with their trade union or contact HR who can facilitate a

discussion either with their manager or an alternative manager (if they prefer to discuss the topic with a female manager or a manager similar in age or both). Employees should however note that all managers are required to familiarise themselves with this policy and have access to training on the menopause.

5.0 Accountabilities

5.1 Managers are accountable for the following;

- Applying this policy consistently, fairly and objectively seeking further advice and guidance from the School's HR Advisor where necessary;
- Having an awareness and understanding of menopause, it's symptoms and how it can effect individuals in the work place;
- Providing a safe place to allow the member of staff to speak openly and honestly, ensuring strict confidentiality and discretion are maintained;
- Providing support to those experiencing menopausal symptoms, as outlined in (section 6.0) including taking a prompt, proactive and supportive approach to discussing symptoms, reviewing working conditions and risk assessments and considering reasonable adjustments as necessary;
- Signposting staff to other appropriate sources of help and advice.

5.2 Employees are accountable for the following;

- Taking personal responsibility to look after their own health and wellbeing, seeking support as necessary;
- Contributing to and helping foster an inclusive, respectful, and supportive working environment, ensuring that the subject of menopause is treated and discussed with respect and individual confidentiality is maintained;
- Being open and honest in conversations with their line manager at the earliest opportunity in order to seek guidance and support;
- Keeping their line manager up to date with any relevant changes in health;
- Ensuring awareness of, accessing and utilising the support mechanisms available and identified within this policy (as relevant), including EAP (Employee Assistance Programme), Occupational Health (OH), Mental Health First Aiders, HR, Trade Union colleagues, utilising external resources and self-help strategies to alleviate symptoms;
- Being willing to help and support colleagues as appropriate;
- Understanding, accepting and supporting any necessary adjustments their colleagues request or are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms;
- Complying with the requirements of this policy.

6.0 Understanding the menopause and practical steps

6.1 Everyone's experience of the menopause will be different. Many but not all will experience some form of physical and / or psychological menopause symptoms however, their duration and severity will vary. Some of these symptoms can be quite severe and have a significant impact on everyday activities, including working life.

The most common symptoms include (this list is not exhaustive):

- Hot flushes,
- Headaches
- Muscle and joint stiffness, aches and pains
- Skin irritations
- Fatigue
- Low mood or anxiety
- Reduced concentration
- Mood disturbances
- Irregular periods / heavy periods and clots / light periods
- Weight gain and slowed metabolism
- Dizziness
- Night sweats
- Sleep disruption / insomnia
- Panic attacks
- Reduced libido
- Palpitations
- Loss of confidence
- Depression
- Forgetfulness / memory loss
- Clarity of thought impaired
- Urinary problems
- Dry eyes
- Brain fog

- 6.3 There are a number of ways to manage symptoms, from the medical approach to natural remedies, including dietary and lifestyle changes, refer to the appendices for self-help information and external sources of advice and guidance.
- 6.4 For advice on managing their symptoms, employees are advised to make an appointment with their GP as they will be able to recommend what's right based on the individual's medical history and personal preference.
- 6.6 If an employee has an existing condition that is worsened by the menopause, they may need more time off for medical appointments or treatment for that condition and there may need to be a review, and possibly changes, to any reasonable adjustments that were previously in place.
- 6.7 In addition, some forms of treatment for menopause (e.g. hormone replacement) may induce side effects that may also require some form of workplace adjustment.
- 6.8 Menopause presents in many different forms, to varying degrees and can be a long-term and changeable health condition and therefore each situation will require an individual and reviewable response. Managers are therefore encouraged to take into account the whole range of support options available to them when considering solutions and support that can be put in place for employees. Spotting early signs of ill health or distress, and initiating early intervention is fundamental to supporting employee health and wellbeing in the work place.
- 6.9 There are several practical steps that managers are advised to take / consider to support their employees who are going through the menopause. These are outlined below;
- Creating an environment in which employees can have open conversations about health matters or concerns including those relating to menopause and expect all staff and managers to be sensitive and supportive of colleagues who may be affected;
 - Listening to the employee and understanding what symptoms they are experiencing. Acknowledging that they may find the menopause difficult to talk about – discuss somewhere private where it's easy to speak openly and confidentially, ensuring a supportive approach and adequate time for the conversation;
 - Discussing whether the employee has visited their GP and are being supported by them and / or discuss making a referral to occupational health if this would be

beneficial. Signpost the employee to additional external sources of information and self-help strategies, refer to Appendix 1;

- Discuss and agree with the employee what information (if any) they would like to share with team colleagues and how they would like to share this information, consent to share information should be explicit;
- Updating risk assessments for the individual where required, this can help to ensure that menopausal symptoms are not exacerbated. The risk assessment may include arrangements to enable the staff member to be released for urgent visits to the bathroom;
- Managers should keep a record of conversations, supportive actions implemented and reasonable adjustments agreed and review this support on an ongoing basis. Any adjustments should be proportionate and reasonable based on the individual and service needs, examples can be found in Appendix 3
- Asking people how they are on a regular basis will help to create an open and inclusive culture, and encourage someone to raise any concerns.
- Don't make assumptions – remember everyone is different, so take the lead from the individual (ensuring that the opportunity and environment for the discussion is conducive to a confidential discussion).

The Governing Body will ensure that all staff experiencing menopause symptoms receive proactive, tailored, and sustained support that enables them to continue working in their role, effectively and safely. Each situation will be treated in a sympathetic way and in accordance with the policy, taking account of the challenging nature of individual roles in the workplace.

This includes the following strengthened commitments:

- **Guarantee a psychologically safe environment** where menopause-related difficulties can be disclosed without fear of stigma, reputational harm, or negative impact on career progression
- **Access to timely support**, including well-being support plan, Occupational Health, HR, and wellbeing resources, without delay
- **Full access to wellbeing resources**, including counselling, EAP services, peer support networks, and signposting to medical guidance
- **Provide structured return-to-work support** when leave has been taken due to menopause symptoms, including phased return options and temporary workload adjustments.
- **Guarantee confidentiality and dignity**, ensuring that any disclosures are handled sensitively and shared only on a need-to-know basis.

Equality, Dignity, and Inclusion

- **The right to equitable treatment** under the Equality Act 2010, recognising that menopause symptoms may constitute a disability in some circumstances.
- **The right to be treated with dignity**, with menopause recognised as a legitimate workplace wellbeing issue.
- **The right to challenge decisions** if support is not provided in line with this policy.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – External Information and support

Below are external links relating to support services and information about menopause:

- Menopause Matters – provides information on menopause:
<https://www.menopausematters.co.uk>
- British Menopause Society – provides information on menopause:
<https://thebms.org.uk>
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance – these explain how a GP will determine what types of treatments and interventions they can offer: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23>
- National Health Service (NHS) – provides an overview of menopause:
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause>

And

<https://www.nhs.uk/services/service-directory/lesbian-and-gay-switchboard-west-midlands/N10969744>

- Henpicked – provides information on managing menopause:
<https://henpicked.net/menopause/>
- Women’s Health – provides information and support on menopause:
<https://www.womens-health-concern.org/help-andadvice/factsheets/menopause>
- CIPD practical guide for line managers ‘The menopause at work’:
<https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/menopause/people-manager-guidance>
- Health talk website – provides information and support on menopause:
<https://www.healthtalk.org/menopause>
- Simply Hormones – provides information, support and training:
<https://simplyhormones.com>
- Live better with menopause – provides advice and support:
<https://menopause.livebetterwith.com>
- Menopausesupport.co.uk – provides information , advice and support:
<https://menopausesupport.co.uk>
- ACAS –Arbitration and Conciliation Service - provides information
<https://ACAS.org.uk/menopause-at-work>

Appendix 2 – Self-management for employees experiencing menopausal symptoms

Employees who are experiencing menopausal symptoms should consider the following:

- Visiting your GP for advice and guidance;
- Speaking to your line manager to ensure they are aware and can provide support including considering adjustments if needed;
- Finding out more about the menopause from available sources of information - contacting other support groups / individuals as detailed in Appendix 1;
- Use technology where this is helpful, e.g. to set reminders or making notes of their symptoms to share with your GP etc.;
- Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools - Accessing the Employee Assistance Programme for staff counselling / wellbeing advice etc.;
- Speaking to friends, family or colleagues who may be able to provide emotional support;
- Contacting a Mental Health First Aider.

A healthy lifestyle may also help with some symptoms, examples of healthy choices include:

- Eating a healthy, balanced diet;
- Drinking plenty of water;
- Exercising regularly – for both physical and mental health benefits;
- Ensuring adequate rest and relaxation;
- Stopping or deducing smoking;
- Reducing known triggers to hot flushes – caffeine, alcohol and spicy food;
- Think about how you look after your skin – some people find keeping a soothing lotion in the work place helpful;
- Wear natural fibers – think about laying clothing so they can be easily undone / removed;

Try to avoid hot flush triggers (such as hot food / drinks) at work, particularly before a major work event eg a classroom observation, meeting or presentation.

Appendix 3 - Examples of possible adjustments that managers could consider

Adjustments	
Hot flushes	• Temperature control for their work area i.e. USB connected desk fan, moving closer to an open window • Easy access to fresh drinking water • Access to a quiet room for breaks if work involves long periods of standing or sitting, or a quiet area if they need to manage a severe hot flush • Opportunity to move away from a heat source • Adapt uniforms to improve comfort (if relevant) • Limit time needed to wear (PPE) such as face masks (if relevant)
Heavy / light periods	• Access to washroom facilities • Allow for more frequent breaks to go to the toilet • Make it easy to request extra uniforms if needed • Consider if home working would make this more comfortable • Provide sanitary products in all toilets • Make arrangements for emergency toilet visits
Headaches	• Ease of access to fresh drinking water • Consider if there's a quieter place to work • Have time out to take medication if needed • Allow someone to move around / or stay mobile – if these help
Heart palpitations	• Signpost them to their GP • A few lifestyle changes such as reducing caffeine intake or other stimulants such as cigarettes and alcohol
Difficulty sleeping and fatigue	• Consider our flexible working policy or informal arrangements for later start and finish times • Consider if working from home is an option
Loss of confidence	• Hold regular one-to-one meetings • Have protected time to catch up with work • Consider whether additional or refresher training would help • Signpost to L&D team for coaching sessions / any relevant e-learning modules • Signpost employee to Employee Assistance Programme
Poor concentration and forgetfulness	• Adjust working hours to fit times of the day when concentration is better • Review task allocation and workload – consider temporary amendments to duties that are proving challenging • Provide list books, note board or other memory-assisting equipment • Offer quieter space to work • Reduce interruptions if possible • Have protected time to catch up with work • Signpost to the Employee Assistance Programme
Low mood, anxiety, depression and panic attacks	• Direct them to the council's Mental Health First Aiders, where they can speak to a trained colleague (list of MHFA's found on intranet) • Signpost them to the Employee Assistance Programme for confidential counselling/advice • Signpost them to their GP