

## Menopause and Perimenopause – Guidance and Supports for Employees and Colleagues



### Introduction

Your mind and body will go through some significant changes before, during and after the menopause. For many, these changes can have a detrimental impact on daily life and this can be challenging and stressful. We want to encourage menopause conversations and make sure colleagues get the help and support they need in a safe, confidential and supportive environment.

This guidance is developed to support you as an employee experiencing the menopause and your colleagues to be aware of the challenges the menopause can bring, the supports available and break the stigma of talking about the menopause to champion better working lives. You do not have to make anyone aware that you are going through the menopause, however if you are experiencing symptoms you are advised to have a conversation with your line manager and/or HR Partner in order to make sure you are supported. It is also important to be aware that whilst it is generally accepted that the menopause affects people between 45 and 60 years of age, it can occur much earlier for some and perimenopausal symptoms can be felt from up to 6 years prior to the onset of menopause.

### Is it the menopause?

Menopause is part of the natural ageing process. It refers to the time when menstruation has ceased for 12 consecutive months. It is triggered by lower levels of oestrogen, which decrease naturally between the ages of 45 and 55. Whilst it is a natural process, it can be brought on earlier by certain things e.g. chemotherapy, hysterectomy. Here is a reminder of the terms:

**Menopause** – Menopause is part of the natural ageing process. It refers to the time when menstruation has ceased for 12 consecutive months. It is triggered by lower levels of oestrogen, which decrease naturally between the ages of 45 and 55. Whilst it is a natural process, it can be brought on earlier by certain things e.g. chemotherapy, hysterectomy. The menopause can cause a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms that can last for several years. The majority of menopausal women experience symptoms, but everyone is different. Symptoms can fluctuate and be felt to varying degrees. Experiencing any of the typical symptoms can pose a challenge for women as they go about their daily lives, including at work.

On average the menopause lasts 7.4 years. However, others experience symptoms that can last for several years and have an impact on their performance and attendance at work. Some people go through menopause with little impact on their daily life.

**Perimenopause** – the time leading up to the end of your periods when changes start to happen. This typically starts in the age groups of late 30s to early 40s.

**Post-menopause** – this is a biological stage of life when a woman has not had a period for over 12 consecutive months

**Premature menopause** – this occurs before the age of 40 (also known as POI - premature ovarian insufficiency) which may be brought on because of illness or surgery

**Surgical menopause** - follows the removal of one or both ovaries or radiation of the pelvis.

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**Here is a list of symptoms (not exhaustive) some of which you may be experiencing.**

- Hot flushes that can start in the face, neck or chest, before spreading upwards and downward; may include sweating, the skin becoming red and patchy, and a quicker or stronger heart rate. Sweating may be profuse, requiring a wash and change of clothes.
- Heavy and painful periods that can be very tiring and require frequent changes of sanitary wear and need to wash. Some affected may become anaemic.
- Night sweats, restless leg syndrome and sleep disturbance leading to fatigue.
- Low mood, irritability, anxiety, panic attacks, palpitations (noticeable heartbeats), loss of confidence, tearfulness/feeling emotional, withdrawing.
- Tiredness, poor concentration, and memory problems.
- Frequent or urgent need to pass urine, urinary incontinence or infections such as cystitis.
- Dry and itchy skin, dry eyes.
- Joint and muscle aches and stiffness.
- Weight gain.
- Reduced sex drive
- Headaches and migraines
- Hair loss
- Osteoporosis, where a decrease in strength and density of bones leads to bone thinning.
- Side effects from hormone replacement therapy (HRT)

There are 40+ symptoms of the menopause - see the Menopause Hub Symptom Checker for a full list <https://www.themenopausehub.ie/useful-resources/symptom-checker>

Not everyone struggles, but three in four do experience symptoms, and these don't just switch off when you arrive at work. This is why it's important to know how to talk to your manager about menopause. Some small changes in the workplaces can make a really big difference.

### Options

- In the first instance you should talk to your manager. If you don't feel comfortable talking to your manager, you might consider talking to a HR Partner or a trusted colleague.
- If required, an occupational health appointment can be made to establish which supports and reasonable adjustments might help to alleviate your menopausal symptoms.

- Facilitated to attend medical appointments – Medical appointments are covered under sick leave however local arrangements, approved by Head of School/Unit, are also accepted. Managers are encouraged to be flexible when approached by those who need to attend appointments related to the menopause. Please discuss with your manager or HR for guidance on requesting time-off.
- Contact the Employee Assistance Service - this is a 24/7 free and confidential support service designed to assist you in dealing more effectively with any personal or work-related problems you might be facing including the menopause and provides access to mental health and wellbeing supports. The service is operated confidentially by Spectrum.Life, the largest provider of employee health and wellness services in Ireland. They empower people to take control of their own mental health and give them the knowledge, tools and support they need to look after it on an ongoing basis.

<https://www.ucd.ie/engage/employeerelations/employeeassistanceservice/>

- Report any harassment, victimisation or discrimination because of issues related to the menopause to your manager.

It can be hard to talk to your manager about something so personal but they are a professional and are there to support you at work. Don't be afraid to ask for changes at work that may help you cope more easily with your menopausal symptoms. Here are some top tips to get the best from your conversation:

<b>Prepare</b>	Check the UCD Policy on Menopause and visit the website. Talk to other supports around the menopause which can also help to prepare for the conversation such as HR Partner, EAS, Mental Health and Wellbeing Support Colleagues and others.
<b>Keep a diary</b>	Making notes of how your symptoms are affecting you at work can help you both come up with some reasonable, practical solutions (see list of some practical changes below). Often changes are fairly small and simple, but they can really help.
<b>Book a meeting</b>	Have a time and date in the diary means you're not catching your manager on the hop, and they can also prepare for the meeting. Ask to have conversations in a private place where you won't be interrupted by anyone else. You can also book some private space to have your conversation in confidence.
<b>Agree on what you will do</b>	Together, you can come up with an action plan which works from both perspectives. They may need some time to seek advice themselves or find out what is on offer.
<b>Follow up</b>	This is really important, as symptoms can change over time. It may be that you need the reasonable adjustments tweaked a little if this happens.

**Practical Changes at Work to discuss with your manager – these are not exhaustive and needs will vary depending on the individual.**

- Whether you can work flexibly, if your job allows this.
- Can you sit by an opening window for some fresh air or a breeze?
- Can you adjust the air conditioning or heating? Do you need a desk fan for when you have a hot flush?
- Can you change clothing such as that required to be worn in a laboratory for example for something more comfortable (or natural fibres) or remove layers? Do you have easy access to toilets and washing facilities?
- Can you get cold drinking water when you need it? Is there somewhere you can rest or take a quiet break if you need to?
- Is your desk or workstation set up properly to reduce aches and pains?
- If your work involves long periods of sitting or standing, can you move around freely or take regular breaks?
- Can you take time off for healthcare appointments or leave early if your symptoms flare up?
- Can you start and finish work later than usual, or change your shift, if you have a restless night's sleep? If you aren't already routinely working from home, can you do so on a day when it would help you manage your symptoms?
- Is there a quiet space you can go to in the workplace for a short period if you need to

### **Supporting Colleagues**

An individual may be affected by the menopause directly or indirectly, therefore it is essential to have an open mind, be sensitive to the issues and not make any assumptions. It is important not to ignore the impact of menopausal symptoms at work or to simply regard them as “a women's thing”. Similarly,

- It can be difficult to know how to support a colleague during the menopause. Learning how the menopause can affect women – both emotionally and physically – can really help.
- When someone has spoken with you in confidence, it is important to respect that and to keep the information confidential.
- Educate yourself about what changes are common during this time of life, and offer lots of patience, understanding and support.
- Not all women want to talk about the menopause but if your colleague does mention it in conversation, don't be embarrassed. Talking about it openly can normalise the conversation.
- If your workplace offers menopause awareness sessions, attend them.
- Workplace “banter” which has historically been the acceptable way menopause has been dealt with in some organisations, could be interpreted as harassment. It is upsetting for the person being mocked and critical that we act with kindness and tolerance to all of our colleagues. Employees can report any harassment, victimisation or discrimination because of issues related to the menopause to their manager.

***The University want to ensure that it continues to provide the best supports that it can to employees on their menopause journey and to people managers supporting employees and for that reason these documents are iterative. If you have suggestions around other supports that may be of assistance or raising awareness around this topic please contact [edi@ucd.ie](mailto:edi@ucd.ie)***

## Resources

### Internal

- HR Partners
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Support Colleagues
- Employee Assistance Service

*The following are links to some external sites that you may find useful. We are aware there is a lot of guidance available, and everyone is different so please use this as a guide only and advise if there are any links that should be added to this list.*

- The Menopause Hub, Ireland's only multidisciplinary menopause clinic  
<https://www.themenopausehub.ie/>
- Symptom Checker – menopause symptoms  
<https://www.themenopausehub.ie/symptom-checker>
- The HSE, Ireland <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/menopause/>
- Newson Health, UK <https://www.newsonhealth.co.uk/resources/>
- The Women's health Concern UK – the consumer arm of The British Menopause Society  
<https://www.womens-health-concern.org/>
- The Daisy Network charity, which provides support for women experiencing premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency  
<https://www.daisynetwork.org/>