

# Menopause and Work Policy

<b>Formally adopted by the Trustees of:-</b>	<b>West Norfolk Academies Trust</b>
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## 1. Introduction

The menopause affects every woman<sup>1</sup>. On average this happens between the ages of 45 and 55. When an individual begins the menopause before the age of 40 it is classed as Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI). There are more women in the workforce aged over 50 than ever before and the trend is for upward levels of labour force participation amongst this group. The majority of women experience symptoms that can affect their lives, including their work. Some women will experience debilitating symptoms and symptoms usually last 4-8 years<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, it is very important that all women feel encouraged to speak with their Headteacher, or line manager, if they are experiencing menopausal symptoms, which require support. Action can then be taken to enable them to undertake their role with confidence and assurance.

It is very important that support is offered to women where it is communicated or recognised that they are experiencing menopausal symptoms. This will help to reduce absenteeism and increase retention of highly skilled and experienced employees. It will also reduce risk of tribunal claims for sex and disability discrimination.

## 2. Scope

The school expects employees to adhere to this policy in line with the school's obligations under equality legislation. Headteachers will ensure that all reasonable adjustments or supportive measures are considered to allow equality of access and opportunity regardless of age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; or sexual orientation.

This policy is part of the Trust's overall commitment to safety, wellbeing and duty of care to its employees. The Trust is committed to being inclusive and supportive of all its staff. This policy applies to all employees who are experiencing menopausal symptoms. It also provides a framework for managers to support employees throughout their menopause to enable them to improve their experience at work, ultimately helping them to remain at work.

Through the implementation of this policy, the Trust will be mindful of the employer obligation to seek to maintain and protect the mental health and wellbeing of all staff as far as is reasonably practicable.

## 3. Policy Aims

- To offer help and support to any employee who is experiencing symptoms caused by the menopause, which is affecting their work.
- To maintain a safe, healthy and productive workplace.
- Encourage an environment where employees feel comfortable discussing the effects of the menopause.
- To educate all employees on what the menopause is and how it can affect employees
- To provide Headteachers and managers with a framework for supporting employee's experiencing the menopause.
- To provide support to ensure the employee remains at work and absence is kept to a minimum because the correct support is provided.

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<sup>1</sup> This could also include transgender and non-binary people.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics and information sourced from the Faculty of Occupational Medicine.

## 4. Relevant Legislation

- **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974** - places a duty on the employer to protect the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees
- **Equality Act 2010**- sex and disability discrimination

## 5. Definition

The **menopause** is defined as a biological state in an individual's life that occurs when they stop menstruating and reach the end of their natural reproductive life. Once the individual has not had a period for a year, this is classed as being menopausal.

The time leading up to the menopause, when an individual may experience menopausal symptoms is known as the **perimenopause**. This can last for years before the menopause.

The time after the menopause has occurred (when the individual has had their last period) is known as the **postmenopause**.

During the perimenopause and menopause the levels of oestrogen and progesterone change significantly and this can cause a whole host of physical and psychological symptoms. Research has found that there is no uniform experience so the Trust will be aware that each individual experiences the stages of menopause differently and some individuals may be more impacted by the experience than others. Training may be provided to a nominated individual or group of staff, within the school, to better understand the diversity of experiences, and be able to support employees from diverse backgrounds more effectively e.g. disabled employees, employees with existing medical conditions or neurodivergent employees may experience additional side effects or find existing challenges are exacerbated.

## 6. Symptoms

Symptoms can affect physical and mental health. In some women they will only last a few months, for others it could be years. The average length of time is four years. Some symptoms are listed below but there are many more.

Physical:

- Hot flushes – causing the face, neck and chest to turn red and sweaty. Some women will experience being drenched with sweat, which soaks through the clothing. Hot flushes can also cause dizziness, light-headedness and even heart palpitations.
- Night sweats
- Sleep disruption – as a result of other symptoms
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Joint pain
- Heavy periods

Mental/psychological symptoms:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Mood changes
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Brain fog
- Poor memory
- Reduced confidence
- Panic attacks

- Irritability
- Reduced ability to multi-task

All of the above can lead to time off work and/or a negative effect on an individual's performance at work. An individual experiencing any of these symptoms who is not receiving any support is likely to have little control over how the symptoms impact on their work and life. Additionally, individuals can find some of the symptoms embarrassing and not feel able to perform their role as they may be expected e.g. sudden hot flushes which cause heavy sweating, or frequent memory loss, could mean a female employee loses confidence or experiences heightened anxiety to stand in front of their class or present at a Trust or Governing Board meeting.

Symptoms can have a significant impact on attendance and performance. Where an individual is unaware that their symptoms are a result of the menopause or is reluctant to share their experiences with their employer, the impact on work can be wrongly dealt with as a performance issue.

West Norfolk Academies Trust is an approachable, open and supportive employer and will endeavour to address any issues and provide support that could help to alleviate the impact of the symptoms the individual is experiencing. It is more often the psychological symptoms that affect an individual's ability to work the most. See section 8 for what support can be offered.

## **7. Employees Responsibilities**

### **7.1 Employees undergoing the menopause**

It is expected that employees will:

- Find out about the menopause from available sources. See section 10.1.
- Seek medical advice from their GP where necessary.
- Be honest in conversations with Headteachers/managers/occupational health and HR, especially where an employee feels that their symptoms are affecting their performance and/or attendance.
- Be willing to discuss and/or implement practical needs to improve their experience at work. See section 10 for suggested support.
- Look after their own health e.g. getting enough rest, eating well and regular exercise.

### **7.2 Work colleagues**

It is expected that employees will:

- Look out for the health and wellbeing of colleagues, be sensitive in any approaches made to enquire about issues or raise issues sensitively with the Headteacher/management.
- Respect adjustments put in place for others.
- Be considerate, understanding and respectful.

## **8. Headteacher Responsibilities**

### **8.1 It is expected that Headteachers will:**

- Encourage an approachable, supportive environment, which encourages employees to be confident about raising any issues they may be experiencing.
- Encourage a professional curiosity culture where employees feel confident to have discussions on the subject, which will help to break stigma and prevent stereotyping.

- Consider accessing training for managers, who are often the first point of contact when discussing menopause at work.
- Consider setting up an informal support group to discuss concerns or plan wellbeing activities
- Manage all disclosures with professionalism, sensitivity and confidentiality – the employee will need to agree to other colleagues being made aware.
- Decide on and implement reasonable adjustments to support the employee.
- Be mindful that all employees and their experiences are different, so a one size fits all approach is unlikely to be successful.
- Be aware that each stage of menopause transition may require different support or adjustment.
- Be mindful that not all employees will want to discuss their menopause symptoms or even be open about going through the menopause. In these cases, the school will respect that decision and consider what support could be offered generally (see section 10).
- Monitor employee absence in line with the school's absence management policy and procedure. Employees experiencing menopausal (including perimenopausal) symptoms will be considered as if the symptoms were related to a disability, for absence procedure purposes. Menopause related absence will be recorded separately, where it is known to be menopause related.
- Ensure that performance and capability procedures do not discriminate against staff members experiencing the menopause

## 9. Procedure

9.1 Where an employee has approached the Headteacher (or their line manager) to discuss the impact their menopausal symptoms are having, or a situation has arisen where it is clear a conversation is required with an employee the Headteacher (or line manager) will:

- Read this policy in preparation
- Consider whether the severity and duration of the employee's menopause symptoms are such that they could constitute a disability. In such circumstances, it will be considered whether any reasonable adjustments are necessary.
- Arrange an informal meeting to discuss the employee's situation and decide what action can be taken, taking into account section 8 and any suggestions from the employee. The meeting should be held in an appropriate location to maintain confidentiality. At the meeting the employee and headteacher (or Line Manager) will:
  - Agree together what action can be taken and how the employee can be best supported. This is most easily recorded by using an action plan template (*Menopause and work action plan F314 can be found at the end of this policy*).
  - Record any adjustments and actions on the action plan. Ensure completion or review dates are assigned to any actions. Subsequently, where completion or review dates cannot be met, ensure the employee is informed of this and kept up to date on progress.
  - Conduct a risk assessment to identify risks and implement appropriate control measures. The risk assessment will need to consider the specific needs of the individual in question and include (but not limited to) assessing;
    - Existing symptoms
    - Temperature and ventilation
    - Access to a quiet space
    - Access to toilet facilities
    - Access to drinking water
    - Level of workplace stress
    - Review of workload and work activity
    - Consideration of flexible working adjustments

- Record and implement any reasonable adjustments identified on the risk assessment. These can be recorded on the action plan so that the actions are all in one place.
- Ensure the action plan and risk assessment are reviewed every term or more frequently where required (e.g. if new symptoms arise).
- Schedule a follow up meeting one month after the initial meeting takes place to ensure the employee is being supported successfully.
- Schedule future meetings to ensure agreed reviews take place.

Where adjustments are not successful or if symptoms develop/change and require other adjustments the Headteacher (or Line Manager) can:

- Make a referral to occupational health, having already discussed this with the employee and implement any recommendations, where reasonably practicable.
- Keep the action plan up to date and under review.

## 10. Support

Often individuals do not realise that their symptoms are related to the menopause (or perimenopause) and therefore may not talk about it and subsequently do not ask for help. Or they are aware but do not want to talk about it because they feel they will not be supported or understood, due to lack of awareness from colleagues or managers.

Individuals who frequently experience symptoms are more likely to feel less engaged at work, experience job dissatisfaction and therefore their performance may decrease, or they may appear less committed. It is important that where this is recognised, support is offered as if it is left unchecked it could lead to the individual's attendance dropping or leaving their job, which leads to a negative outcome for the individual and for the Trust as their employer.

Where the school is aware support is needed:

- Arrange an informal meeting with the employee to establish what support would help them and follow the procedure outlined in section 7 above.
- [Offer the employee the advice which can be found on the Faculty of Occupational Medicine website](#) to help them consider what they can do to reduce the impact of their symptoms.
- Consider improving ventilation in the work environment to alleviate hot flushes.
- Suggest the employee works to understand their hot flush triggers, this could be hot drinks or food - and avoids them, where possible, just before presentations or times of known heightened anxiety.
- Provide access to a rest room and/or a quiet place to work where required, to help with hot flushes or poor concentration.
- Advice on how to access counselling or mindfulness programmes to assist with anxiety or panic attacks.
- Explore using relaxation techniques to help reduce the impact of symptoms.
- Where possible, check the suitability of certain tasks and assess whether tasks can be re-allocated to lessen stress triggers; such as reducing heavy lifting
- Ensure there is adequate access to toilets.
- Arrange for storage space to be available should the employee need to store a change of clothing.
- Arrange, where viable, for the employee (teaching staff) to be supported by an HLTA who can take over should they need to leave the class.
- Also see general support below.

General support which can be offered regardless of whether or not symptoms are known:

- Consider all flexible working requests sensitively – it may help the employee to start later where they are not sleeping well.
  - Referral to the School's Occupational Health provider for further information and ways to support.
  - Have a number of desk fans readily available for employees to use should they need them.
  - Provide easy access to drinking water.
  - Allocate a room as a rest room for employees.
  - Access to notebooks/reminder systems (paper or electronic) to aid with memory loss – e.g. a school secretary/receptionist may find it helps to write down what incoming calls they've taken and what action is required.
  - Raise awareness of symptoms of the menopause through sharing this policy with all line managers
  - Raise awareness of how employee assistance programmes can be accessed
- Be aware that whilst this policy is going to apply in the main to employees directly experiencing the menopause, other employees may indirectly be impacted, e.g., a partner of an individual who is currently going through the menopause. Their sleep may be disturbed if their partner is unable to sleep well at night. This may cause them to be sleep deprived and feel that they are unable to concentrate properly or perform in their role as they were.

## 10.1 External Support

- Occupational Health
- Read the [BS 30416, Menstruation, menstrual health and menopause in the workplace – Guide](#)
- Read the [guidance on menopause and the workplace on the Faculty of Occupational Medicine website.](#)
- Read the [guidelines on diagnosis and management of menopause on the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence website.](#)
- Where the employee's menopause experience is linked to symptoms of a mental health condition, [visit the Remploy website.](#)
- Visit the [Menopause and me website.](#)
- For support with early menopause, [visit the Daisy Network website.](#)
- Read [information on the Healthtalk.org website.](#)
- Read [information on the Women's Health Concern website.](#)
- Read [information on The Menopause Exchange website.](#)

## 11. Data Protection

When an employee informs the Headteacher or their line manager that they need support because they are going through the menopause any data collected in relation to this will be processed in accordance with the school's data protection policy. Data collected will be held securely and accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purposes of supporting the employee and ensuring the organisation remains a safe place to work in. Inappropriate access or disclosure of employee data constitutes a data breach and should be reported in accordance with the school's data protection policy immediately. It may also constitute a disciplinary offence, which will be dealt with under the school's disciplinary procedure.



## Menopause and Work Action Plan F314

**Action:** Employee and Line Manager/HeadTeacher to complete and agree this form together.

Employee's symptoms	Effect on employee's work	Specific agreed actions	Timescale for implementation of actions	Reasonable adjustments	Timescales for implementation of reasonable adjustments	Review date
						/ /
						/ /
						/ /
						/ /
						/ /
						/ /

General agreed actions (including agreed next steps):

Employee signature:	Date: / /
Headteacher/Principal signature:	Date: / /