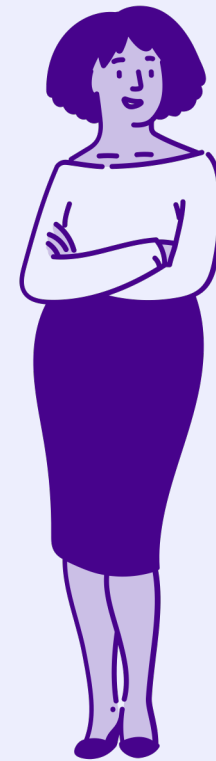


A guide for managers: Understanding menopause challenges in the workplace



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A note about language

At Fertifa, we use the terms ‘woman’ to refer to those who were assigned-female-at-birth (AFAB). We understand that not everyone who is AFAB identifies as a woman or as any gender. We're here for anyone who identifies as a man, woman, gender non-binary, gender non-specific or anyone who defines themselves, their gender, their sexuality in any way we've not mentioned. We want to make our content as inclusive as possible, but we're learning all of the time. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you feel that we can make our content, our language or generally anything at Fertifa more inclusive and representative of you.



Why menopause matters in the workplace and beyond

Why menopause matters in the workplace

As the fastest growing demographic in the workplace, more women than ever before will go through the menopause, or experience menopausal symptoms, at work.

Despite often being at the peak of their careers, our studies have shown that half of them have decreased job satisfaction and a staggering 42% consider leaving work altogether.

This has to change, first and foremost for the people affected and also for the UK companies estimated to be losing 14 million working days every year.

We've seen firsthand how necessary it is for managers and team leads to recognise the difficulties that can come with menopause. A manager's behavior is the biggest influence on someone's experience at work.

By understanding why menopause matters, you can give your team members the support they may need. As a manager you can help build an inclusive work environment with employee wellbeing at the heart of your company.

Remember, if someone in your team is struggling with menopause symptoms or looking for support, we can help them here at Fertifa.

Through Fertifa, your team will have access to unlimited 1-2-1 clinical advice, treatment and best-in-class wellbeing support throughout their perimenopause and menopause journeys.

In this guide, we'll explain the different stages and symptoms of menopause, how it can impact peoples' lives, and the changes we can make to better support women and break the taboo in the workplace and beyond.



70% of women will experience menopausal symptoms, but only **38%** of women will seek help from a GP. **One quarter** of women who visited a GP with symptoms said they **weren't asked about menopause.**

— Menopause Support UK

Pre-menopause to post-menopause: The four stages of menopause to know about

The four stages of menopause every manager needs to know about

If you haven't been through the menopause yourself, it can be difficult to understand exactly what each stage means. We've seen how people can feel supported at work if those around them understand more about what they're actually going through. So, one of the most important things you can do as a manager is to understand the stages of the menopause and what may be involved in each one. That way that if someone in your team asks you for support or opens up about their perimenopause or menopause struggles, you'll have an informed understanding of what they may be going through. In the UK, the average age of menopause is 51 (with most people ranging between the ages of 45 – 55). Here's each stage and what it means.



Stage 1: Pre-menopause

When is this: The pre-menopause period is the time from someone's first period to their last period.

What is this: Most pre-menopausal people have regular periods, with exceptions like pregnancy, certain contraceptives, hormone therapy, medical interventions and some medications.



Stage 2: Perimenopause

When is this: The time when someone is experiencing menopausal symptoms but still has periods .

What is this: This is the time around the menopause when hormone levels begin to fall, causing menopausal symptoms. In the UK this usually starts aged 42 to 43 but can start as young as an individual's late thirties and last for 5 to 10 years.



Stage 3: Menopause

When is this is: This is medically defined as someone's last natural period.

What is this: We need to wait one full year to be confident this was their last period.

So, if somebody's last period was 18 Oct 2021, then we can be confident that they started the menopause phase on 18 Oct 2022.



Stage 4: Post-menopause

When is this: Any time after someone's last period.

What is this: Usually by this point hormone levels have dropped and levelled out. Once you enter post-menopause, you're in this stage for the rest of your life. Your hormone levels will remain low and you'll no longer have a monthly period. You can't get pregnant anymore.

About **1 in 100 people** get early menopause before the age of 40. This is sometimes called **Premature Ovarian Insufficiency** or 'POI'.

POI happens when a woman's ovaries stop working – normally before she is 40. It's especially important to diagnose POI early on to prevent the long-term consequences of low oestrogen. Without treatment, people with POI will have a decreased life expectancy, so it's vital to raise awareness and encourage people to seek help as early as possible. Some people will also have a medically induced menopause. This happens when there's been surgical removal of the ovaries, chemotherapy, radiation damage or using medications that induce menopause as part of treatment for a disease or condition.



The signs and symptoms of perimenopause and menopause

Perimenopause and menopause can cause a range of physical and mental health symptoms

Everyone's experience of perimenopause is different with symptoms varying from person to person.

These commonly include, but aren't limited to: anxiety, brain fog, difficulty concentrating, depression or low mood, dry eyes and skin, hot flushes, insomnia, irregular periods, memory loss, sweating, tiredness, weight gain, irregular periods, heavy periods

Lots of these symptoms are misunderstood or misdiagnosed. A lack of formal GP training means there's little awareness of how to effectively treat them.

People may put their symptoms down to something else, like stress, burnout, anxiety or depression. This means they don't get the right treatment, when they need it, and symptoms remain or get worse.



50% of women
don't know what perimenopause is until they start having symptoms because conversations around menopause are only just becoming normalised

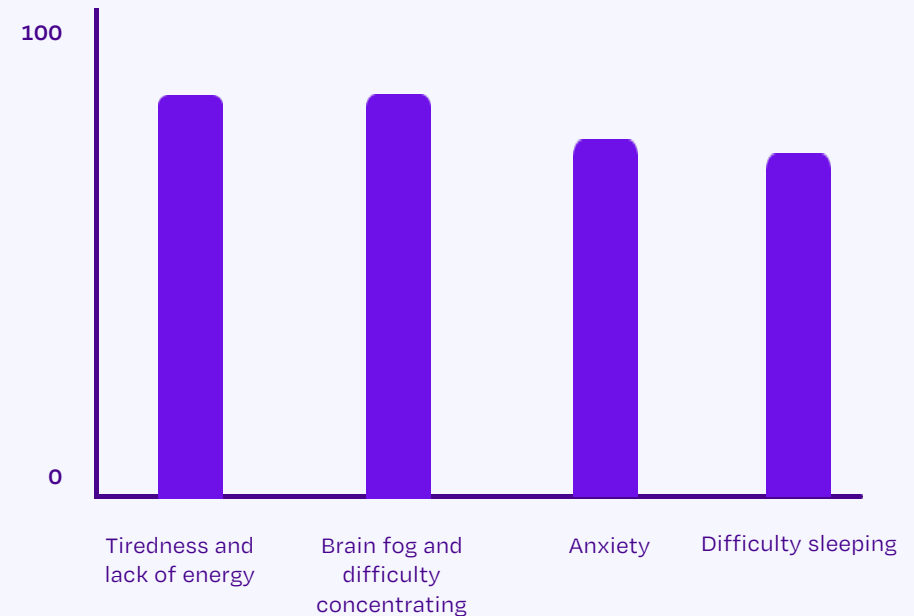
The physical and emotional impact of menopause

Cognitive impairment and mental health symptoms have the biggest impact on careers and work

We teamed up with The Latte Lounge, a leading online community for midlife women, and surveyed 500 working women experiencing perimenopause or menopause. The top symptoms were:

- Tiredness or a lack of energy 87%
- Brain fog or difficulty concentrating 87%
- Anxiety 84%
- Difficulty sleeping 83%
- Poor memory 79%
- Low mood or depression 77%

The top physical symptoms were sweating (75%) and weight gain (73%).



The four most common cognitive menopause symptoms

Talking about menopause at work is still an uncomfortable topic

Despite so many people being impacted by it, menopause is still a taboo topic at work. It's up to senior leadership, HR teams, managers and team leads to help drive that change and to normalise talking openly about the menopause. So many of us will go through it whilst continuing to work – it's crucial in creating an inclusive environment to work in.

According to our survey, 70% did not speak with their employer about their symptoms, 26% said they were "too embarrassed" and 28% "feared it may make them look incapable of doing their job properly".

Menopause and perimenopause can make life difficult for lots of people, so much so that 42% of people consider leaving work altogether.

Of course, it's not just work that's affected. Divorce rates are high in the perimenopause and menopause years and suicide rates for women are highest from the ages of 45 to 54.



70% of women

Didn't speak to their employers about their symptoms

Treatments to help with menopause symptoms

1. Using Hormone Replacement Therapy or 'HRT' to treat menopause symptoms

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) can effectively treat menopause. In most cases, the treatment works quickly and effectively and any side effects pass within 3 months of starting treatment. Here are the most common side effects to be aware of:

- breast tenderness
- headaches
- feeling sick
- indigestion
- abdominal pain
- vaginal bleeding

There's only a small proportion of people who shouldn't take HRT, usually those with a history of breast cancer, ovarian cancer or womb cancer in the family. If you have a history of blood clots or high blood pressure, you may not be allowed to take it either.

But it's a personal choice and not everyone wants to take it. The lack of GP training, long wait times to see a specialist doctor, and exaggerated media coverage of the level of risk in the early 2000s, means that uptake is still low.



2. Exploring other medications to help with menopause

- **Tibolone** is a prescription medication and is only suitable for women who are post-menopausal. It is similar to HRT and does present some risks and side effects, but can help ease symptoms like hot flushes, reduced libido and low mood.
- **Clonidine** is also a prescription medication which is sometimes used to reduce hot flushes and night sweats. It carries some potentially difficult side effects including depression and constipation. Research indicates that it has a relatively limited impact on symptoms of menopause.
- Many experts believe that antidepressants can help with hot flushes. These medications have not undergone clinical trials to test if they can help with his particular symptom and as such are not licensed for this use. They can also have significant side effects.
- **Bioidentical** or 'natural' hormones are not as closely regulated as the HRT offered by the NHS, nor have they been as rigorously researched and tested. They are hormone preparations made from plant sources and many people find them helpful, although they are not recommended by the NHS.



3. Herbal remedies to ease menopausal side effects

A number of products sold in health shops claim to help treat menopausal symptoms. There is some evidence to suggest that black cohosh and St John's Wort may help with hot flushes. There remains some uncertainty about the correct doses to use and whether these therapies have any real lasting benefits.

Do be aware that some of these remedies (St John's Wort in particular) can cause serious side effects if they're taken in conjunction with medication.

Note also that although these therapies are frequently labelled as 'natural', that does not always or necessarily mean they are good quality or safe for you to use. We'd always recommend that people speak to their GP or Fertifa Patient Advisor before taking any herbal remedies or supplements.

Lots of people look at other herbal treatments including Ginseng and Chinese herbal medicines, although these have not been scientifically proven to improve hot flushes, low mood or anxiety.



4. Practicing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or trying acupuncture

As well as alleviating anxiety and low mood (both of which can arise as a result of menopause), Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has been found to help with night sweats and hot flushes.

This is mainly through developing good sleep hygiene, relaxation techniques and establishing healthy and positive attitudes to the challenges menopause presents.

As a result, CBT is often a recommended treatment during perimenopause and menopause itself.

Many people undergo acupuncture with a view to reducing hot flushes and night sweats. It is likely that acupuncture's efficacy is linked with a high placebo effect because clinical trials do not show a distinction between true and sham acupuncture (sham acupuncture being when the patient is needled but not at true acupuncture points), but you may be interested in [learning more](#) nonetheless.



How to support someone in your team through menopause challenges

How to support someone in your team through menopause challenges

The role of a manager in supporting someone through the menopause is crucial in ensuring employee wellbeing and in creating an inclusive environment. Managers and team leads are most often the first point of contact if someone needs to discuss health concerns or is looking for extra support at work. So, it's important to be prepared for this. If you've not experienced the menopause yourself (or even if you have!), we know it can be difficult to know what to do or how to best support your team. If someone in your team asks you for support, here are a few ways you can help:



Encourage them to get specialised menopause support

Fertifa gives people access to specialist doctors who can take you through a full health assessment and provide a prescription for HRT if you need it. Our Patient Advisors are on hand any time for more holistic advice around nutrition and wellbeing. It can be helpful to keep a diary of your symptoms and write down what you want to say before your consultation, so you feel as prepared as possible.

As well as individual support, we also provide menopause in the workplace training for businesses of all shapes and sizes. This includes training team leads and managers on how to start sensitive conversations about the menopause with the people in their team.



Let them tell you what support they might need

Give them the opportunity to explain what they're experiencing in their own words, and to tell you what support they may need. Menopausal symptoms will look very different from person to person, and there's no one-size-fits-all approach you can take to support someone through it.

We recommend asking them something along the lines of: "How best can I support you as your manager?" or "Is there anything I can do to make things easier for you?"

Menopause symptoms can change over time, so make sure to keep the conversation open so that the person can speak to you about anything they need or don't need.



Make your workplace as comfortable as possible

Employers have a legal duty to make a suitable assessment of the workplace risks to the health and safety of their employees – and this includes people experiencing menopause symptoms. There are small things you can do as a manager to make a person's workspace better.

1. If your office doesn't have one already, speak to your HR team about creating a relaxing space to decompress. Whether it's a meeting room that's booked out or a sofa in an area away from office desks. This can be helpful to people experiencing symptoms like hot flushes and anxiety
2. Give everyone access to a desk fan. This can help people experiencing sudden hot flushes or daytime sweats, and can make a big difference to people feeling comfortable in the office
3. Be open to a flexible working arrangement. One menopause side effect is sleep disruption and night sweats which make it difficult to sleep. Someone may need some time of work if they've not slept properly, or to start slightly later than usual. Make sure that people know they can work from home too and that taking a break during the day is fine too
4. Make sure there's easy access to bathroom facilities and that there are sanitary products in cubicles. A common menopause symptom is very heavy bleeding or irregular periods
5. Encourage people to talk about what they're experiencing



Make your workplace as comfortable as possible

This is so you can give someone direct and clear advice if they come to you asking for support.

Make sure you know what they may be entitled to in terms of time off, and where to go if they need further support. If your company doesn't have a menopause policy, be an advocate for this change. Channel 4 have [shared their menopause policy publicly](#), if you want an example of best practice to take to your employer.

In our survey, just 16% of people said that they were aware their employer has a menopause policy, with 51% saying there was nothing in place and 33% were unsure.





Start honest and open conversations

It can be very overwhelming for people to open up about their menopausal symptoms and women can feel embarrassed talking to their managers about what they're experiencing.

As a manager it's up to you to start open and honest conversations, even if they're difficult to begin with. The most important thing is not to make assumptions about how someone may feel and to be empathetic and sensitive in how you start conversations.

If you're concerned about someone's performance or wellbeing (for example, if someone is taking a lot of time off of work or arriving late) - instead of asking a direct and potentially insensitive question like "are you experiencing menopause symptoms", rather open the conversation more generally and ask how they're doing.

You could say something like: "I've noticed you've been arriving late and I wanted to check in to see how you were doing?".

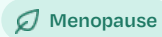
It's very important to find a private room for these conversations and to make it clear that whatever is discussed will be kept fully confidential.



Educate yourself and sign post resources

The more you know about menopause and the symptoms, the more likely it'll be that people in your team speak to you about how the menopause and how it may be impacting them. Here are some useful resources for you to learn more about the menopause:

- [Fertifa](#) - specialised support, education and benefits for people experiencing menopause
- [The Latte Lounge](#) - support, signposting, workplace training and awareness-building events
- [The Menopause Charity](#) - helping everyone understand perimenopause
- [Menopause Matters](#) - information about the menopause, symptoms and treatment options
- [The Daisy Network charity](#) - supporting women experiencing early menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency
- [The Menopause Café](#) - events where strangers gather to eat cake, drink tea and discuss menopause
- [Henpicked](#) - an online hub of information and resources from experts
- [MegsMenopause](#) - an 'honest and frank' look at all things menopause.



Time to talk about menopause.

13 million women right now are going through perimenopause or menopause. Through Fertifa, your team will have access to unlimited 1-2-1 clinical advice, treatment and best-in-class wellbeing support throughout their menopause and perimenopause journeys



Mr. Gidon Lieberman

Menopause specialist

Our programme has been curated by Mr. Gidon Lieberman – our Medical Director and a menopause specialist.

[Find out more](#) ↗

Mr. Lieberman is an accredited member and trainer for the British Menopause Society and is a Regional Preceptor for the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists for Menopause.

We understand your journey

We understand the impact perimenopause and menopause can have on your life – especially when it comes to work. With decades of experience researching, caring for and treating menopause, our best-in-class clinical team will be by your side every step of the way.

50%

of employees who go through menopause have decreased job satisfaction.

70%

of people don't ask for help regarding their menopausal journey from their employer.

28%

of employees said that they 'feared it may make them look incapable of doing their job'.

Did you know?

Menopause is a natural part of ageing that usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, as a woman's oestrogen levels decline. In the UK, the average age for a woman to reach menopause is 51.

However, it can have a significant impact on employee wellbeing. Changes in hormones can lead to mood swings, sharp changes in body temperature and sleep disruption for an average of 4 years.



Get in touch with us
at **enquires@fertifa.com** if you have
any questions or you're looking to
support your people with reproductive
health benefits using Fertifa.

