

# Genuinely Helpful Guide to Menopause at DMU



Throughout this guide the terms 'women' & 'her' are used. Whilst using these terms, DMU, as an inclusive community, also acknowledges that some people who do not necessarily identify as women, may also experience hormonal symptoms.

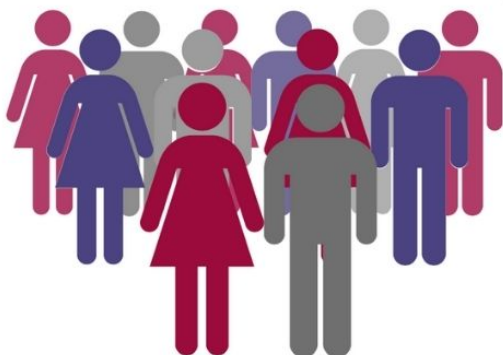
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# What's inside

Page

1. Introduction	1
2. What the menopause is	2
3. Why we're talking about menopause now	3
4. Menopause symptoms and possible treatment options	5
5. Where help and support are available	8
6. We all have a part to play	9
7. Talking with your line manager about menopause	10
8. Talking to your healthcare professional about menopause	11
9. Guidance for line managers	12
10. Where to go for further information	14

Let's talk about  
the menopause...



More than **3 out of 4** women experience menopause symptoms at some time.

But menopause isn't something just women need to know about - men should be aware too so they can support colleagues, friends and family.

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# Introduction

At De Montfort University Leicester (DMU), our aim is to create an inclusive environment of mutual respect and fairness, where everyone feels able to contribute their authentic selves in the best way they can. Talking openly and supportively about menopause is just one of the ways we can support our colleagues to fulfil their potential. This supports our strategic aim of “Enhancing our effectiveness through our diverse and vibrant university community”, as well as DMU Freedom’s aspirations for colleagues to be free to be themselves, and free to succeed.

We want to equip all colleagues with the required education, knowledge, tools and flexibility to enable a supportive work environment for those experiencing menopause symptoms. Overall, anyone going through any stage of the menopause or other hormone-related symptoms at DMU should not feel embarrassed, disadvantaged, or misunderstood.

Women experiencing menopause are the \*fastest-growing workforce demographic in the UK, which means this is a significant issue across all workplaces, including DMU. Furthermore, menopause can affect everyone – our colleagues personally or they may be supporting someone else, such as a partner, family member, friend, or colleague.

In creating this Genuinely Helpful Guide to Menopause at DMU, we have discussed the topic internally with employee consultation forums, reviewed best practice and also taken guidance from external experts in this field. This guide is designed to aid communication between line managers and colleagues and to reduce or remove the barriers in discussing menopause. It will also help the university to support consistent attendance and retain staff through a more accommodating and output-orientated approach to flexible working and performance.

We want everyone to feel comfortable talking about menopause, never feeling that the subject is taboo or off limits. By creating a fully inclusive and supportive environment, DMU aims to become a menopause friendly organisation, where all colleagues are well informed and feel able to speak openly about menopause.

## Did you know?

**51** is the average age women reach menopause

**1 in 4** women experience serious symptoms

**2 in 5** women said their menopause symptoms had been worse than they had expected

**8 in 10** women of menopausal age are in work

**1 in 100** women reach menopause before the age of 40

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# What the menopause is

Menopause is a stage of every woman's life when her hormones fluctuate and change. This isn't always an easy transition, but with the right support it can be improved. Menopause is a completely individual experience and different for everyone; while not every woman experiences symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work and in their personal lives.

Creating an understanding working environment for those experiencing menopause will help us create a more flexible culture for all and open up communication and dialogue on issues of concern, which will amplify a more open environment that will benefit all colleagues at DMU.

## Some key terms when talking about menopause include:

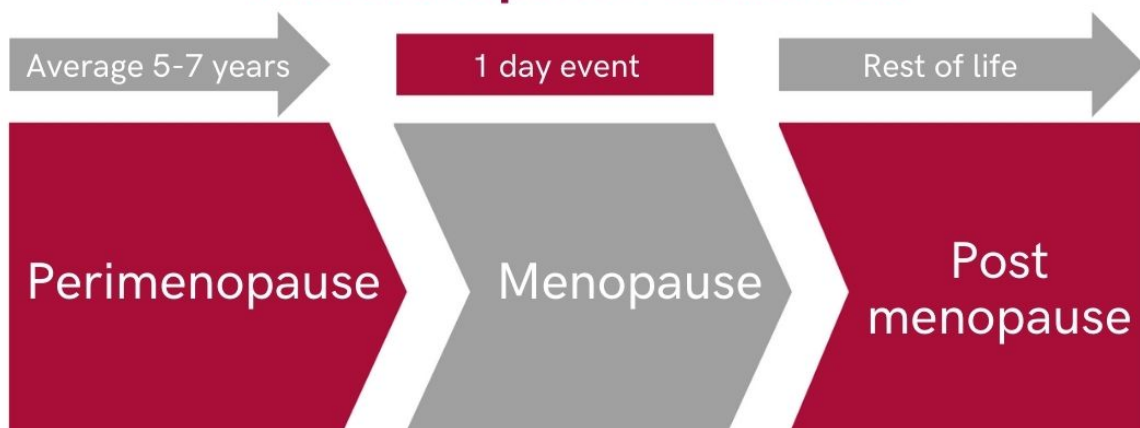
**Perimenopause** is the time leading up to menopause when a woman may experience changes and menopause symptoms; this can be years before menopause.

**Menopause** is defined as a biological stage that occurs when hormones change, and eventually menstruation stops. Usually, it is defined as having occurred when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months (for those reaching menopause naturally). The average age to reach menopause is 51, it's usually between 45-55. However, it can be earlier than this due to surgery, illness, or other reasons.

**Post-menopause** is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months and for the rest of her life.

When we talk about menopause in this guidance, we are referring to any of these stages. Symptoms can change over time and can be experienced at any stage. Other hormonal conditions, medical treatments and processes can also lead to similar types of symptoms e.g. some cancer treatments and gender transition.

## The menopause transition



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# Why we're talking about menopause now

The key reasons we want to talk about menopause and provide support are:

## **The UK's population is ageing**

We're living for longer and working for longer. According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), women over the age of 50 are the fastest-growing segment of the UK workforce. The changing age of the UK's workforce means that around 8 in 10 women in any stage of menopause are in work.

Furthermore, the Advance HE's Equality and Higher Education Staff Statistical Report 2020 highlighted that women represent 54.6% of the UK higher education workforce. Over a quarter of this workforce are women aged between 46 and 55, which equates to more than 60,000 women. Some may be experiencing menopause symptoms that could have significant impact on their working lives, and in turn on higher education institutions overall.

## **It's the right thing to do for DMU**

There are significant benefits to creating an inclusive environment where everyone can fulfil their potential. This includes everyone feeling respected and fairly treated. According to the CIPD, by supporting women with their menopause journey and related symptoms, our university could benefit from:

- Lower sickness absence and improved employee retention.
- Enabling an age and gender inclusive workplace.
- Removing barriers to progression for women and therefore closing the gender pay gap.

The CIPD also report that 6 out of 10 women said that experiencing menopause symptoms had a negative impact on their work (CIPD 2019). This can create physical, social and psychological barriers at work for women and impact their career progression e.g. through sickness absence or even leaving their profession.

Research by the Faculty of Occupational Medicine shows that the majority of women are unwilling to discuss menopause-related health problems with their line manager or ask for the support or any adjustments they may need.

Some may not feel comfortable talking about menopause with male line managers, or indeed with anyone, so we will have an online support area via the DMU Women internet and we will facilitate sessions, such as the DMU Women Menopause Café where advice and peer support from colleagues is available.

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Equally, it should be remembered that in some cultures, menopause is not discussed openly.

In some cases, menopause symptoms can lead to women leaving their jobs. In fact, 1 in 4 consider it according to the Wellbeing of Women survey in 2016. Clearly that is not good for them nor for their employer.

Trans people also may require appropriate consideration and support. They may face some very specific challenges that have some variance to most women, e.g. the impact of drug therapies on menopause symptoms, lack of a menopause stage in their lives etc.

### **It's important for social responsibility**

Introducing menopause support in the workplace is something all responsible employers should aim to do. Anyone can be affected by hormonal changes during their lives for a number of reasons, including pregnancy, fertility treatment, some cancer treatments, gender transition, medical conditions needing hormone treatment, and menopause. These can bring about symptoms which could affect someone at work. Some women sail through their menopause with barely a symptom, but it's not such an easy transition for all.

By talking about it openly, raising awareness and putting the right support in place, we aim to get to a point where menopause is no longer an issue in the workplace at DMU at all.

### **Menopause is covered by employment law**

Menopause is covered under the Equality Act 2010, in the categories of age, sex and disability discrimination. We have a legal duty to ensure that working conditions and practices do not aggravate menopause symptoms and that we protect employees from discrimination based on this transition.

Menopause is also covered under the Health & Safety Act 1974, which places a duty on employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees. Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, the university has a duty to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the workplace risks to the health and safety of their employees. This includes identifying groups who might be particularly at risk e.g. women experiencing menopause, and making reasonable adjustments.

**Menopause awareness is not just relevant for women,  
it's important for all colleagues at DMU.**

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# Menopause symptoms

Menopause is a very individual experience and everyone experiences menopause differently, both in terms of symptoms and personal preference in managing them. 3 in 4 women experience menopause symptoms, 1 in 4 experience serious symptoms.

Hormonal changes can result in a wide range of symptoms, both physical and psychological, affecting various elements of physical wellbeing and mental health. Not all women will experience the same symptoms, and some won't have any symptoms at all. Symptoms can also change over time. Often people are surprised at the range of symptoms.

## Some common symptoms include:

- Hot flushes during the day or night
- Difficulty sleeping, insomnia or fatigue
- Migraines or headaches
- Irregular and/or heavy periods
- Aches and pains
- Urinary issues, e.g. increased frequency
- Nervousness, worry or anxiety
- Reduced ability to concentrate or focus
- Problems with memory recall
- Low mood, depression or changes in mood
- Loss of confidence

All of these can have an impact on women at work and the support of the university, line managers and peers is vital if women are to thrive in our workplace.

By opening up the conversation around menopause to enable women to discuss their symptoms and offering to make reasonable adjustments, we can be more inclusive, and enable all our colleagues to make their maximum contribution and perform at their best.

## Symptoms women say affect them the most at work\*



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\*Source: survey 2018 - TUC, Open University, University of Bristol, University of Leicester, Henpicked: Menopause in the Workplace

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# Possible treatment options

In the next section, there is guidance on options to manage menopause. This is relevant for both those who are experiencing menopause and those supporting them.

Just as each person's menopause symptoms differ, so will their treatment plan, based on their individual preferences and medical history. What works for one woman might not work for another.

Discussing all options with a healthcare professional is crucial to decide the best options, taking into account personal preference, medical history, risks and benefits. Equally, it's important to think about long-term health too. As hormone levels change, we need to take extra care of our long-term health and wellbeing, in particular our heart and bone health.

**There are many options available, including:**

**1. Lifestyle options:** making positive lifestyle choices can really impact symptom management. Lifestyle is always key to good health at any stage of our lives and even more so during menopause and beyond to help manage symptoms and longer-term health. Think about:

- **Diet and nutrition:** making sure we get a wide range of vitamins and minerals is so important for our overall health. Balancing protein, carbohydrate and 'good' fats is also key.
- **Exercise:** important for our overall physical and mental health, can help manage symptoms and improve long-term health including heart and bone health.
- **Sleep:** can feel elusive during menopause and is a cornerstone to good health and managing hormonal balance. There are medical and non-medical solutions that can help, or supportive apps to help you get a better night's sleep.
- **Hydration:** drinking water and keeping our bodies hydrated is important for both our cognition and gut health.
- **Stopping smoking:** this is good for our overall health and is an important consideration with the longer-term cardiovascular risks post menopause. Smoking can also make symptoms worse.
- **Limiting caffeine and alcohol:** these act as stimulants and can increase symptoms like hot flushes and affect our sleep patterns.
- **Managing our stress:** helps us both physically and psychologically. Meditation or mindfulness can help us relax, and calming our minds can assist with anxiety-related symptoms.



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**2. Medical options:** the main medical treatment is Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) – there are many different types and preparations, and different combinations work for different people, so it’s important to work with a healthcare professional to discuss risks and benefits and find the right option for you.

The key is reading up on the facts from reputable sources and being well informed to make your personal choice.

**3. Complementary approaches:** as an additional or alternative treatment option, different herbal remedies may support someone going through menopause. It’s recommended to consult a nutritional therapist or qualified herbalist for a full discussion regarding these options.

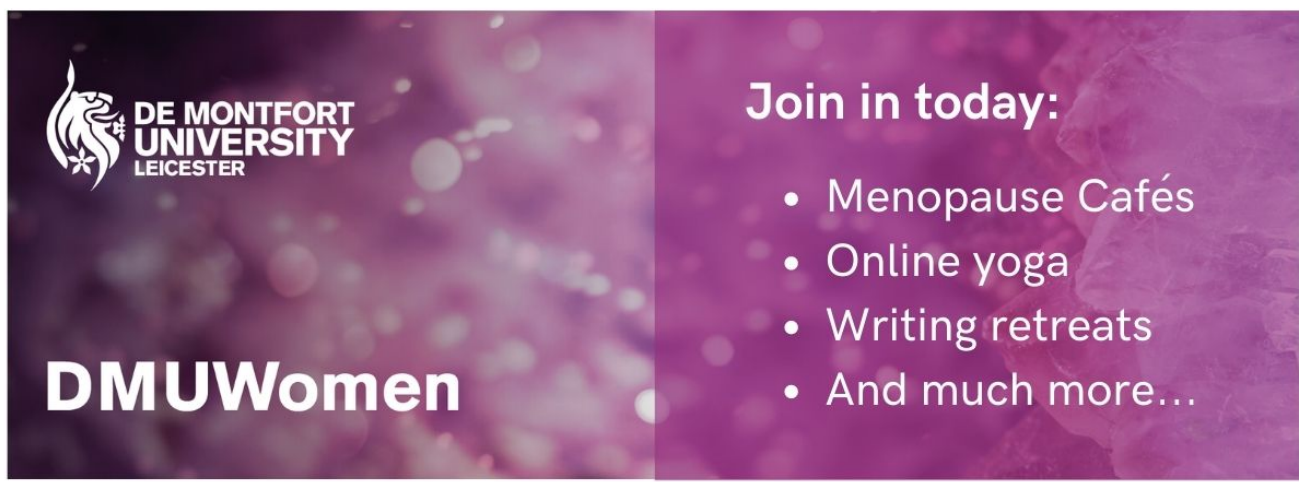
**4. Supplements:** vitamins and supplements can also prove useful. Calcium, magnesium and vitamin D are all important during and post-menopause too.

**5. Non-medical treatments:** a range of non-medical treatments could also be helpful in managing symptoms. These include:

- Yoga – helps with relaxation, physical mobility and builds strength and balance
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)
- Acupuncture
- Aromatherapy
- Reflexology
- And talking!

Our experience at **DMU Women** is that many colleagues benefit from talking with others, sharing ideas and being there for one another. We will continue to facilitate these spaces for connection.

**You are not alone...**

A promotional banner for DMU Women. The left side features the De Montfort University Leicester logo (a stylized white lion) and the text 'DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY LEICESTER' in white. Below this, the text 'DMUWomen' is written in a large, bold, white font. The right side of the banner has a purple background with a subtle floral pattern and the text 'Join in today:' in white, followed by a bulleted list of activities: 'Menopause Cafés', 'Online yoga', 'Writing retreats', and 'And much more...'.

**DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY LEICESTER**

**DMUWomen**

**Join in today:**

- Menopause Cafés
- Online yoga
- Writing retreats
- And much more...

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# Where help and support are available

**Your GP or  
healthcare  
professional**

We always recommend you visit your GP or healthcare professional if you're experiencing menopause symptoms or want to discuss long-term health. They can give advice on medical options, including HRT or other approaches to manage your menopause including diet and lifestyle changes.

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**Line manager**

Talk to your line manager if you're experiencing symptoms that are getting in the way of you being at your best at work. Discuss what symptoms are affecting you in your role, and any workplace adjustments that would help while managing your symptoms. Symptoms can change throughout the menopause, so adjustments may only be temporary and adapted as and when needed.

All conversations will be treated in complete confidence. If you feel that menopause symptoms are negatively affecting you at work, then it's important to seek support.

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**Occupational  
Health**

If needed, your line manager may refer you to Occupational Health for additional support.

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**Employee  
Assistance  
Program (EAP)**

This is provided by an external organisation. It is a totally confidential service and is available to all colleagues 24/7. It gives useful advice and counselling on a wide range of issues that may be affecting you at work or at home.

Contact them on this FREE confidential helpline: 0800 882 4102.  
Or you can also visit the website: <https://www.pamwellbeing.co.uk/>

Alternatively, you can login to the [EAP portal](#) by entering **dmu1** for both the username and password.

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**People &  
Organisational  
Development  
(POD)**

If you're not sure where best to seek support within DMU about how menopause is affecting you at work, or if you need to speak to an objective third party rather than your line manager or a peer support network, then you can also contact your local HR partner in POD.

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**Peer support**

DMU Women and the Menopause Café are both available for peer support.

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# We all have a part to play

This is a guidance document rather than a policy. We can all play our part in creating the right environment to talk about menopause openly. Here are our suggestions:

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**The University** Create policies and strategies which encourage and create a fully inclusive culture.

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**HR** Embed these policies, ensure understanding and offer training.

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**Occupational Health/Employee Assistance Program** Support colleagues with medical, health or wellbeing advice. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) delivered by PAM Wellbeing, is a completely confidential, free of charge service for all DMU employees.

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**Health & Safety** Ensure that statutory and good practice H&S requirements are consistently applied and embedded across DMU.

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**Line managers**

- Be open to talk about menopause with their team members and to offer support as appropriate.
- Ensure that no one experiences less favourable treatment because of the menopause.
- Keep conversations strictly confidential. Put in place any required support/adjustments, and record any agreements made.
- Seek additional advice from HR & Occupational Health where necessary.
- Signpost to relevant sources of support, such as the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

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**Individual employees** To explore options for managing their menopause symptoms by talking to their healthcare professionals and asking for support from their Line Manager, if required.

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**Peer support** Our Menopause Cafés and DMU Women are helpful to discuss your experiences with your peers.

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# Guidance for women experiencing the menopause

## Talking with your line manager about menopause

Some women may find it difficult to talk to their manager about how menopause is affecting them. However, your manager is there to help you be at your best at work. To help you both, preparation is important.

**Prepare for your meeting.** Check out what support is available at DMU. Read this document and explore additional resources.

**Keep a diary of your menopause symptoms and how they're affecting you.** Think about what practical, reasonable adjustments might help, being flexible and ideally coming up with some different options. These may be for a short period of time while you work with your healthcare professional to alleviate your symptoms, or they may last for a longer period.

**Booking a meeting** means you'll have an agreed time and ideally a private office to talk and will be more likely to get your points across.

**Explain your situation clearly.** Talk about how menopause is affecting you at work, what you're doing to manage your menopause and what your line manager could do to help. Discuss what support you would like e.g. reasonable adjustments and timescales.

**Agree with your manager what you can both do.** They may need time to think about the best support. Remember, this may have been on your mind for a long time, but it may be the first time your manager has heard about it. Allow them time to digest the information and seek advice if necessary.

**Do you want the conversation to be confidential?** Some of us are happy talking about menopause openly, others are not. Talk to your line manager about whether you want the conversation to be kept confidential or if you're happy to discuss it with colleagues. It's your choice.

**Follow up.** At the end of the meeting put a time in the diary to meet again, whether that's to agree a way forward, to monitor progress or update. Menopause symptoms can change over time.

**Above all, it's in both your best interests to find a good solution.** All anyone wants is for you to be fit and well and do your job to the best of your ability. Menopause can be isolating if you don't talk to someone, but remember all women go through menopause at some point.

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## Talking with your healthcare professional about menopause

If menopause symptoms are getting in the way of you enjoying life, it's time to talk to your doctor. Here are some helpful, straightforward tips to help you get the best from your appointment:

**Don't wait until symptoms feel unbearable.** Often women feel they must 'put up' with menopause symptoms, but if they are affecting you then there are things you can do and support available.

**Read the NICE guidelines.** The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines are used by your doctor to determine the type of conversations to have with you and treatments to offer. The guidelines for patients are useful to read before you see your GP or healthcare professional.

**Prepare for your appointment.** Keep a list of your symptoms, your menstrual cycle, hot flushes, how you're feeling, any changes you've noticed. Write them down and take them to your appointment.

**If you have any preferences** about how you manage symptoms tell them that too e.g. if you'd like to try hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or not. Your doctor will thank you for it and it's more likely that together you'll find the right solution faster.

**Ask the receptionist** who in the practice is best to talk to about menopause. It might not be your usual GP or a practice nurse, it could be someone who has had special training in the subject.

**Ask for a longer appointment** if you think you need it; some surgeries will do this.

**Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion** if you don't feel you've received the help you need. You know how you're feeling and how it's affecting you.

**Ask if there is a menopause clinic in your area.** If there is, and you think this would be helpful, ask for a referral.

**Take your partner or a friend with you.** They will know how the symptoms are affecting you, could support you at the appointment and find out how to continue supporting you

**Remember, they're there to help and support you** and you should feel comfortable and confident in talking to them about your symptoms and what kind of help you need.

**Don't think you have to struggle** through menopause when there is help and support available.

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# Guidance for line managers

Your role as a line manager is crucial in supporting team members experiencing menopause.

## **It can be a very sensitive topic**

Some people can find it difficult to talk about their menopause. They may worry that they will be seen as no longer up to their job or coming towards the end of their career. It can be a deeply personal topic, and some may find it embarrassing talking about their menopause symptoms. Some may think of it as a personal matter and nothing to do with work. It is important for you to understand about the menopause and be prepared to talk about it.

Your role as a manager is to be there to help your team member be at their best at work. To help you both, preparation is important. This will result in a much better conversation and outcome for you both.

## **Respecting confidentiality**

Confidentiality must be respected, discuss with the colleague how they wish any questions from their peers/colleagues to be managed.

### **Try doing this ...**

- Read this guidance and any other references you may find helpful.
- Ask how you can best help in a supportive manner to show you understand.
- Talk supportively about menopause.
- Keep an open mind and be flexible.
- Listen carefully to your colleague, hear what they say about challenges in the work environment and work together to co-produce a supportive, flexible solution that is mutually beneficial.
- Talk to HR colleagues in POD, if needed, for further guidance on how to support colleagues.
- Be willing to make reasonable adjustments as appropriate.
- Signpost to additional resources (see guides in the reference list and also signpost to DMU Women intranet pages).
- Provide information on how to access the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) if appropriate.
- Encourage the colleague to read this document.

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# Guidance for line managers

## Try to avoid ...

- Making assumptions about menopause.
- Shying away from talking about menopause.
- Never sharing personal information without consent.
- Addressing performance issues without checking about health concerns.
- Managers should not give medical advice, your role is to offer work-related support and understanding, but do signpost and offer support.

Being confident to open the conversation about menopause in the workplace is so important. Asking what support would help can make a big difference. Being willing to consider reasonable adjustments is key to managing menopause at work.

## Reasonable adjustments

These will be different for everyone, which is why having individual conversations and being flexible is important. Many adjustments will be simple and may vary in the time they are needed. Appropriate changes can be made on a case-by-case basis by line managers, thinking about what will support the colleague and the organisational requirements of their particular role.

This is a guidance document, not a policy. Henpicked: Menopause in the Workplace, who have worked with many organisations in the UK and in the Higher Education sector, advise that the following adjustments to working practices may help, depending on the individual context:

- Flexible working approaches, including, where possible and appropriate, an opportunity to work from home. Or adjusting start and finish times to accommodate interrupted sleep patterns.
- Providing workplace showers and improved ventilation to allow for hot flushes and period flooding. Sometimes even just providing a desk fan, for example, can be a big help.
- Offering quiet workspace to accommodate poor concentration.
- Creating space in your area, where people can talk about menopause in a supportive and inclusive manner.
- Additional time off to attend medical appointments.

**You don't need to be a menopause expert  
but you do need to offer support and a listening ear.**

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# Where to go for further information

## **General information on menopause and possible treatment options:**

- NHS: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause>
- Women's Health Concern: <https://www.womens-health-concern.org>
- Menopause Matters: <https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/>
- Mymenopausedoctor: <https://www.menopausedoctor.co.uk/>
- Henpicked's menopause hub: <https://henpicked.net/menopause-hub/>
- Complementary/alternative therapies: <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/complementaryalternative-therapies-menopausal-women/>
- National Institute of Medicinal Herbalists. Find a qualified medical herbalist in your area: <https://nimh.org.uk/find-a-herbalist/>
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can be helpful as a complementary treatment option: <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/cognitive-behaviour-therapy-cbt-menopausal-symptoms/>

## **Surgical and early menopause:**

- Woman will experience a surgically induced menopause after a hysterectomy. Information on hysterectomy: <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/factsheets/hysterectomy/>
- Premature ovarian insufficiency (POI) occurs when the ovaries stop functioning normally before age 40:
  - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/early-menopause/>
  - <https://www.daisynetwork.org/>

## **Menopause books:**

DMU Women Menopause Café groups have read and discussed a number of books. Suggestions include:

- Baker, S (2020) - The Shift
- D'Souza, C (2016) - The Hot Topic
- Devlin, R (2019) - Men... Let's Talk Menopause
- Garlick, D (2018) - Menopause: The Change for the Better
- Newson, L (2019) - Menopause, Haynes Guide

## **Information on extent to which menopause transition impacts on women's economic participation:**

- Government Equality Office Report on Menopause: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/menopause-transition-effects-on-womens-economic-participation>

**DMU Related Policies:** Diversity & Inclusion, Flexible Working and Attendance Management.

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