



**A GUIDE TO  
MANAGING  
MENOPAUSE  
AT WORK**

Guidance for line  
managers

## Putting menopause at the top of the business agenda

One of Masabi's core values is "We Put People First". Perimenopause and menopause will affect nearly half of our workforce at some point in their careers. So, this is something we should be facing head on and, true to our culture, talking about openly and honestly. Our goal is to make careers at Masabi more fulfilling and the lives of our employees easier by introducing open conversations about this very intricate topic.

While this guide uses the term 'women' to talk about people who may experience perimenopause and menopause transitions, we know that it can impact trans or non-binary colleagues who don't identify as women in the same manner. We will support all colleagues experiencing perimenopause and menopause transitions, so encourage people to ask for help if they need it.

Menopausal women are the fastest-growing demographic in the workplace. However, many may be struggling to manage the psychological and physiological changes their bodies are going through. A quarter of menopausal women will experience debilitating symptoms – from hot flushes and night sweats to brain fog and increased anxiety – and for some, it forces them out of the workplace completely. Research shows that menopause symptoms have led to almost a million women in the UK alone leaving their job, and others have been forced to take long-term absence from work. At Masabi, we believe that we have a responsibility to support women throughout this transition.

Menopause shouldn't be a taboo. We would like our managers to recognise when support is needed and facilitate open conversations with employees about what they're experiencing. Women at Masabi should feel comfortable saying that they're struggling with symptoms and confident that they can have an honest conversation with their line manager that will lead to guidance and support.

## What every manager needs to know about the menopause

**Every manager should know what the menopause is, when it happens and how it can affect people.**

### What is it?

It's a natural stage of life when a woman's oestrogen levels decline and they stop having periods. As menopausal symptoms are typically experienced for several years, it is best to describe it as a 'transition' rather than a one-off event.

### When does it happen?

The menopause typically happens between the age of 45 and 55. However, for some women it can be earlier or later. The 'perimenopause' is the phase leading up to the menopause, when a woman's hormone balance starts to change. During this time, a woman may start to suffer from menopause symptoms but could still be having periods. Women are said to have reached the menopause when they haven't had a period for a year. The symptoms last on average for four years, but for some can last much longer.

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The average age for a woman to undergo the menopause is 51, but around 1 in 100 experience it before the age of 40. This is known as premature ovarian insufficiency (POI), premature ovarian failure or 'premature menopause'. 'Early menopause' occurs between the ages of 40 and 45. Often, there is no clear cause for the early onset of menopause, but it can be a result of surgery (for example, oophorectomy), illness or treatment (such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy).

### What are the symptoms?

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. Some of the common symptoms of the menopause include:

- mental health symptoms, such as mood disturbances, anxiety and/or depression, panic attacks, or a loss in confidence
- memory loss, reduced concentration, or difficulty assimilating new information quickly. This is commonly known as "brain fog"
- hot flashes (brief and sudden surges of heat usually felt in the face, neck and chest)
- sleep disturbance that can make people feel tired and irritable
- night sweats (hot flashes that happen during the night)
- irregular periods and/or periods that become light or heavy
- muscle and joint stiffness, aches and pains
- recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs), including cystitis
- headaches
- weight gain
- palpitations (heartbeats that become more noticeable)
- skin changes (dryness, acne, general itchiness)
- reduced libido (sex drive)

## Your role as a manager

The role of line managers in supporting women experiencing menopause transition is crucial to ensuring they get the same support and understanding as with any other health issue. Your goal is to ensure that the person suffering symptoms does not feel that they need to hide what is happening to them. They should feel supported and valued throughout the transition and enjoy all of the flexibility and support offered to anyone experiencing difficulty with their health.

Line managers are responsible for:

- building open relationships within their teams, fostering a culture where people feel comfortable raising health issues with their managers without fear of judgment or penalty
- responding positively and respectfully when a team member chooses to raise issues about their health or mental health
- guiding the person through Masabi's internal processes, ensuring they are aware of all the support available
- implementing Masabi policies, ensuring that we Put People First.
- managing absence and keeping in touch if someone is off work ill or because of their menopausal symptoms, as well as supporting an effective return to work
- not making assumptions – everyone is different, so take your lead from the individual

## It's good to talk: open and honest conversations

The easier you make it for someone to open up to you, the easier it will be to identify the support they need.

Menopause can affect people's confidence and it can be very daunting talking to someone who has no knowledge or awareness of the menopause. The more knowledgeable you are about the range of menopausal symptoms, the less likely a member of your team will feel embarrassed to approach you and discuss how the menopause is affecting their health and their work. Awareness about the symptoms and range of support available within the organisation will also increase your own confidence in discussing the issue.

### Starting the conversation

While any health condition can understandably be a sensitive and personal issue to discuss, some of the symptoms associated with the menopause can manifest in a particularly intimate or visible way. It's therefore understandable why many women could feel embarrassed and reluctant to discuss the impact of their symptoms. However, most people would prefer a concerned and genuine enquiry about how they are, as opposed to silence. Ask someone how they are, and after they say "I'm OK", gently ask again.

Don't make assumptions about someone's health condition or ask them a direct question as to whether they have menopause symptoms. If you have concerns about someone's wellbeing or performance, ask general, open questions such as, 'How are you doing at the moment?' or 'I've noticed you've been struggling with your work a little recently, and I wondered if you're okay?' It's up to the individual to disclose any particular symptoms or health issues they may be experiencing.

Approach conversations with empathy and try not to be embarrassed by the issue or how the individual is feeling. Regular catch-ups or one-to-ones are an opportunity to start the conversation, which should always be in a private, confidential setting where the employee feels at ease.

### How to approach a sensitive conversation

It's important to set the right tone when opening a conversation about any sensitive issue. Try not to worry too much though, as being oversensitive will stop you from doing or saying anything. Review the following checklist before approaching a sensitive conversation, and you won't go far wrong:

- avoid interruptions – switch off phones and respect the importance of the discussion
- listen actively and carefully
- avoid offering unsolicited advice
- avoid judgemental or patronising responses
- ask clarifying questions which are simple, open and non-judgemental
- encourage the employee to talk
- give the employee ample opportunity to explain the situation in their own words
- show empathy and understanding, but do not make this about yourself or your own experiences
- be prepared for some silences and be patient
- focus on the person, not the problem
- avoid making assumptions or being prescriptive
- be mindful of other external physical changes that are sometimes attributed to the transition such as hair loss or weight gain. Making comments about someone's physical appearance is rarely

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appropriate at work. It could be additionally damaging if that person is going through transition. Be kind and supportive

### Confidentiality

If someone tells you about their health condition, including menopausal symptoms, this should be treated as confidential. If they want information about their condition to be shared, consent must be explicit. You should discuss with them who will be told and by whom, as well as the information they do or don't want shared with colleagues.

## Making appropriate adjustments

In most cases, simple changes to someone's working environment can help ensure that menopause does not become a barrier to someone enjoying their role fully. As a manager, you have a responsibility to consider and put in place these "reasonable adjustments" to alleviate or remove these barriers.

Start by having a confidential, two-way conversation with the individual to identify the specific issues that person is experiencing. Engage with the person on topics that they feel could make their work life a little easier.

### What kind of adjustments could help?

- Understand how the symptoms could affect someone's work
  - In perimenopause and the early stages of menopause, women describe changes in their ability to think clearly, make decisions and function well mentally. Some describe this as "**brain fog**". They may experience difficulty assimilating and making use of new information. Be mindful of this when assessing performance in the same way we would take any health issue into account. Engage with People Operations if you believe there are performance issues that require discussion with the individual.
  - Dealing with things like "brain fog" or hot flushes during work is not easy and many menopausal women report the onset of **anxiety or depression**. Again, be aware of this as you engage and speak to People Operations or the MHFA team for guidance.
- Remind them of Masabi's flexible working policy, for example. They can start later, finish later and work from home more often.
- Recognise that someone may take more unplanned, short-term absence at very short notice. For example, if they've had sleep disruption and/or night sweats and needed some time to recover the following morning.
- Look at ways to cool the working environment, for example, provide a fan, move a desk close to a window or adjust the air conditioning to help with hot flushes and/or daytime sweats.
- To help with headaches, provide a quiet area to work, or allow the individual to work from home.
- Allow someone to move around or stay mobile, if that helps with muscular aches and pains.
- Ask People Ops for a sit/stand adjustable desk.
- Encourage employees to discuss concerns at one-to-one meetings to help with psychological issues (loss of confidence, anxiety etc).
- Encourage a discussion with a mental health first aider or with People Ops all of whom can refer employees to a private therapist.
- Remind the employee about the [MHFA resources](#) available in each region.

- Discuss possible adjustments to tasks and duties that are proving a challenge
- Refer the employee for an informal discussion with a MHFA'er who can offer direct assistance such as Sam Wilde.
- Discuss whether it would be helpful for the employee to visit their doctor, if they haven't already – remind them about options available from their Private Medical Insurance such as Doctor Care Anywhere in the UK, where you can book next day GP appointments.

## Further support

- Contact Sam Wilde who has volunteered as a subject matter expert and can advise both managers and their team members.
- Masabi recognises the importance of medical support during this difficult transition. Where public services or private healthcare will not cover the cost of Hormone Replacement Therapy, Masabi will cover the following costs:
  - Up to £200/\$250/€240 per year for a private consultation with a consultant.
  - Up to £80/\$150/€94 per month for prescription HRT medication prescribed as a direct result of perimenopause or menopause transition. As prices for these prescriptions can vary, please consult with People Operations if you feel you are sufficiently covered.
    - *The operational details of this benefit are still being worked on so please give us time to implement it.*
  - Note that this will be a taxable benefit so we still need to figure out how we do that. The current working theory is that employees will have to cover their tax burden.
- If you are dealing with perimenopause or menopause transition, please feel free to join the #masabien-menopause-support Slack channel to engage in open discussions. This is a support channel for people directly affected as opposed to an open educational channel.

## Conclusions

Remember, the goal of this guidance is to educate managers so that people experiencing perimenopause and menopause feel that they can openly talk about their experiences with the goal of improving their transition. If in doubt, Put People First (and feel free to discuss anything with People Ops and Sam Wilde)

## Useful resources

### UK

- [NHS guidance on menopause](#)
- [Women's Health Concern \(the patient arm of the British Menopause Society\)](#)
- [British Menopause Society](#)
- [Daisy Network \(support for premature menopause\)](#)
- [Faculty of Occupational Medicine](#)
- <https://menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk/>

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- <https://www.talkingmenopause.co.uk/>
- <https://menopausupport.co.uk/>
- <https://www.balance-menopause.com/>

### **US**

- <https://www.menopause.org/>
- <https://www.daisynetwork.org/about-poi/>
- <https://www.imsociety.org/>
- <https://www.balance-menopause.com/>

### **RO**

- <https://www.romedic.ro/forum/despre/menopauza>
- [https://www.sfatulmedicului.ro/comunitate/menopauza/menopauza\\_29172](https://www.sfatulmedicului.ro/comunitate/menopauza/menopauza_29172)
- <https://www.reginamaria.ro/articole-medicale/ce-trebuie-sa-stii-despre-menopauza>
- <https://www.imsociety.org/for-women/>
- <https://www.csid.ro/sanatate/sanatate-health/premenopauza-simptome-tratament-naturist-terapie-hormonala-19188083/>
- <https://remifemin.ro/2018/12/17/cele-mai-frecvente-intrebari-referitoare-la-menopauza/>
- <https://doc.ro/totul-despre-menopauza/totul-despre-premenopauza-perimenopauza>
- <https://mediplusclinic.ro/2019/11/17/s-a-lansat-prima-clinica-de-menopauza-din-romania-special-istii-te-invata-cum-sa-faci-fata-bufeurilor-si-anxietatii/>