

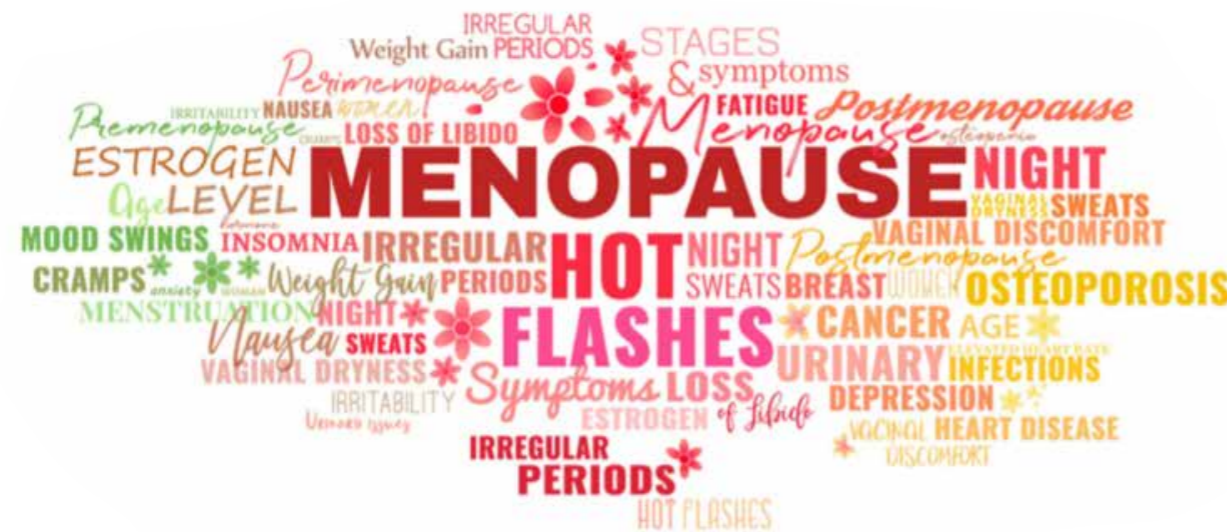
LET'S PAUSE...

for a chat about Menopause



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What is the Menopause?

The menopause is not an illness or medical condition: it is a completely normal life event experienced by women.

However, the troublesome symptoms that the menopause can bring are all too often under-recognised, brushed aside or undervalued, and not taken seriously. Symptoms such as hot flushes, fatigue, mood changes and brain fog not only affect home life and relationships, but careers, study and colleagues too.

Nine out of ten women say their menopausal or perimenopausal symptoms have a negative impact on their work - according to a survey of 1,132 women by The Menopause Doctor website ([menopausedoctor.co.uk](https://www.menopausedoctor.co.uk)). Other findings included: 9% had a disciplinary process, as a result of poor performance. 51% of respondents reported having time off work due to their symptoms, 51% had reduced their working hours, while 32% considered quitting their job altogether.

This guide contains advice and tips on how to make the menopause more manageable in the workplace or while studying, including how employers/tutors should be supporting women and ways women can help to reduce the impact of their symptoms at work/study. First, let's look at what the menopause is, symptoms women may experience, and then discover the treatments and lifestyle changes that can make a real difference.

The menopause is when women (or transgender people who have a uterus) stop having periods. It occurs when the ovaries stop producing eggs and as a result, levels of hormones in her body called estrogen and progesterone fall. There are four key stages:

Pre-menopause: the time in your life before any menopausal symptoms occur

Perimenopause: when a woman experiences menopausal symptoms due to hormone changes, but still has her period

Menopause: when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months

Post-menopause: the time in a woman's life after she has not had a period for 12 consecutive months

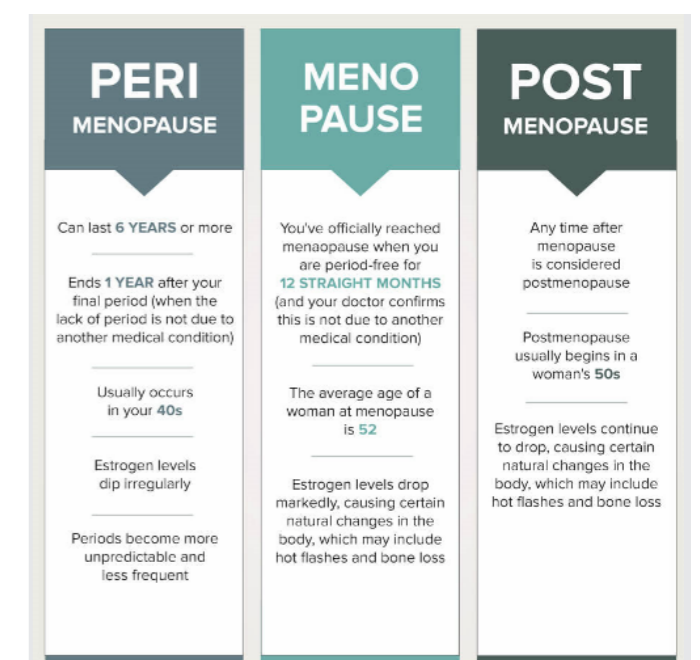
When and how does the menopause happen?

Did you know that women spend on average a third of their life postmenopausal.

The average age of the menopause is 51, and symptoms of the perimenopause often start at around 45 years of age. If the menopause occurs when a woman is under 45 years, then it is called an 'early' menopause. If it occurs before the age of 40, it is classed as premature ovarian insufficiency (POI).

Certain biological and physical circumstances can trigger an early menopause or POI. These may include surgery involving the ovaries, having radiotherapy to the pelvic area as a treatment for cancer, or certain types of chemotherapy drugs to treat cancer.

It is estimated that half of women report having to take time off work because of their perimenopausal or menopausal symptoms. We have no way to record this, as currently we do not define 'menopause related' as a reason for absence, and many women record their absence relating to the actual symptoms, and not menopause related.



LET'S PAUSE - Introduction

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working and studying environment for everyone.

Menopause is a natural part of every woman's life, and it isn't always an easy transition. With the right support, it can be made much better. Whilst every woman's symptoms are different and can vary from mild to severe, there are measures that can be put in place to support those who are affected at work/study and improve their working/studying experience during this time.

Menopause should not be taboo or 'hidden'. We want everyone to understand what menopause is, and to be able to talk about it openly, without embarrassment. This is not just an issue for women, men may also be impacted by the symptoms and experiences felt by a woman they work or live with, and therefore need to be open to talking about the subject and be aware of the support that can be provided.

The changing age of the UK's workforce means that between 75% and 80% of menopausal women are in work. Research shows that due to the existing taboo the majority of women are unwilling to discuss menopause-related health problems with their line manager, nor ask for the support or adjustments that they may need.

Mature students are welcome to study at Brunel and we feel that they should be supported through symptoms that they may experience due to menopause.

This booklet sets out the guidelines for employees and managers on providing the right support to manage menopausal symptoms at work, and how Brunel can support students manage the symptoms in relation to their studies. It is not contractual and does not form part of the terms and conditions of employment but is supported as part of our commitment to health and wellbeing.

Aims

The University aims to:

- Foster an environment in which everyone can openly and comfortably instigate conversations or engage in discussions about menopause
- Ensure everyone understands menopause and the associated impacts, can confidently have constructive and healthy conversations, and are clear on the University's policy and practices, supported by the Human Resources Reward Team and Student Services
- Educate and inform managers about the potential symptoms of menopause, our reasonable adjustments policy and how they can better support employees at work and students while studying
- Ensure that women suffering with menopause symptoms feel confident to have a discussion, and ask for support and any reasonable adjustments can be considered so they can continue to be successful in their roles or studies
- Enable discussions and understanding to be embraced by all genders, recognising that anyone may be affected directly, or indirectly by menopausal symptoms
- To find ways to be aware of absence due to menopausal symptoms, so as better to support employees and students, and ensure that all the available signposting is available
- Assure women that we are a responsible employer and provider of education, committed to supporting their needs during menopause

Scope

These guidelines apply to all University employees and students.

The University has considered current guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), to inform these guidelines. The NICE guidelines set out the recommendations for medical professionals when treating menopausal women, and for patients as to the treatment and guidance they should be offered.

Self-management, with support from the University, managers and colleagues, will help to manage symptoms. Appendix 1 details some recommendations to support symptomatic women and men, who may need advice and support.

In accordance with NICE guidelines, women should be advised to seek medical advice from their GP in the first instance. Appendix 2 offers a helpful guide for women on how to have constructive conversations about menopause with their doctor.

Roles and Responsibilities

Employees

All staff are responsible for:

- Taking a personal responsibility to look after their health
- Being open and honest in conversations with managers/HR and Occupational Health
- If a member of staff is unable to speak to their line manager, or if their line manager is not supporting them, they can speak to HR (either their HR Business Partner, their Union, or a member of the Reward team), which has oversight of Occupational Health, the Employee Assistance Programme and Wellbeing agenda
- Contributing to a respectful and productive working environment
- Being willing to help and support their colleagues
- Understanding any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms



Line Managers

All line managers should:

- Familiarise themselves with the Menopause Guidelines
- Be ready and willing to have open discussions about menopause appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and professionally
- Use the guidance in Appendices 1 and 2, signposting and reviewing together, before agreeing with the individual how best they can be supported, and any adjustments required
- Record adjustments agreed, and actions to be implemented
- Ensure ongoing dialogue and review dates
- Ensure that all agreed adjustments and support are adhered to

Where adjustments are unsuccessful, or if symptoms are proving more problematic, the Line Manager may:

- Discuss a referral to Occupational Health for further advice
- Refer the employee to Occupational Health
- Review Occupational Health advice, and implement any recommendations, where reasonably practical
- Update the action plan and continue to review

Students

All students should:

- Be considerate of other students or employees that may be experiencing symptoms of the menopause;
- Seek appropriate support from the University Student Services if the symptoms are impacting on their studies.

Personal tutors

All personal tutors should:

- Familiarise themselves with how students can be supported if their symptoms are affecting their studies;
- Be aware of referral mechanisms to Student Services to be able to provide best support to individuals.

Student Services

- The teams within Student Services will work with individual students to ensure that any reasonable adjustments are put in place and to minimise the impact on the studies of anyone affected by the symptoms of menopause.

'Your Rewards' Team

- Rewards will:
- Offer guidance to managers on the interpretation of these guidelines
- Attend training sessions and develop briefing sessions for all employees
- Seek to find ways to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this guidance in respect of related absence levels and performance
- Review the guidelines and information to ensure the latest information is available to employees

- Raise awareness of support available, and work with partners such as Occupational Health and the Employee Assistance Programme to enhance information and guidance available

Links to other policies

This document is linked to:

- Dignity at Work
- EDI Strategy
- Flexible working Policy
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Employees
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Students

External links

- All colleagues can access counselling by contacting the Employee Assistance Programme CareFirst through the Reward pages
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines. These explain how your GP will determine what types of treatments and interventions they can offer you. You can find out more information by using the following link <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/About-this-information>
- The National Health Service provides an overview of menopause. You can find more at <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Menopause/Pages/Introduction.aspx>.
- Menopause information. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists offer further information in a dedicated area of their website at: <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/menopause/>
- Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) information and support on very early menopause. You can find out more at <https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk>
- Information on hysterectomy. This provides an insight into surgically induced menopause as a result of having a hysterectomy. Further details can be found at <https://www.hysterectomy-association.org.uk>
- Henpicked. This site provides information on managing menopause, and an insight into women's stories (see <https://henpicked.net/menopause/>).

Appendix 1

Managers' Guidance for colleague discussions / Tutors Guide to Support Students

We recognise that every woman is different, and it is, therefore, not feasible to set out a structured set of specific guidelines.

If an employee/student wishes to speak about their symptoms, or just to talk about how they are feeling (they may not recognise themselves that they are symptomatic), or if a male employee wishes to speak about a family member, please ensure that you:

- Allow adequate time to have the conversation
- Find an appropriate room to preserve confidentiality
- Encourage them to speak openly and honestly
- Suggest ways in which they can be supported (see symptoms below) – hand out the Menopause Advice Sheet (Appendix 2)
- Agree actions, and how to implement them. Ensure that this record is treated as confidential and is stored securely
- Agree if other members of the team/other students should be informed, and by whom
- Ensure that designated time is allowed for a follow up meeting. Do not rely on quick queries during chance encounters in the corridor or break room

Symptoms Support

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically, including, but not exhaustively or exclusively; support for women should be considered as detailed below:

Hot Flashes

- Request temperature control for their work area, such as a fan on their desk (where possible a USB connected desk fan to ensure environmentally friendly) or moving near a window, or away from a heat source
- Easy access to drinking water
- Be allowed to adapt prescribed uniform, such as by removing a jacket
- Have access to a rest room for breaks if their work involves long periods of standing or sitting, or a quiet area if they need to manage a severe hot flush

Heavy/light Periods

- Have permanent access to washroom facilities
- Aim to ensure the availability of sanitary products are available in washrooms or with defined colleagues

Headaches

- Have ease of access to fresh drinking water
- Offer a quiet space to work
- Offer noise-reducing headphones to wear in open offices
- Have time out to take medication if needed

Difficulty Sleeping

- Ask to be considered for flexible working, particularly suffering from a lack of sleep.

Low Mood

- Agree time out from others, when required, without needing to ask for permission
- Identify a 'buddy' for the colleague to talk to – outside of the work area
- Identify a 'time out space' to be able to go to 'clear their head'
- Contact the University's Employee Assistance Programme provider
- Contact Student Services for additional services

Loss of Confidence

- Ensure there are regular Personal Development Discussions / tutor sessions
- Have regular protected time with their manager/tutor to discuss any issues
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work/study

Poor Concentration

- Discuss if there are times of the day when concentration is better or worse, and adjust working pattern/practice accordingly
- Review task allocation and workload
- Provide books for lists, action boards, or other memory-assisting equipment
- Offer quiet space to work
- Offer noise-reducing headphones to wear in open offices
- Reduce interruptions
- Have agreements in place in an open office that an individual is having 'protected time', so that they are not disturbed
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work

Anxiety

- Promote counselling services provided by University's Employee Assistance / Student Services
- Be able to have time away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques;
- Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises, or going for a walk.

Panic Attacks

- Agree time out from others, when required, without needing to ask for permission
- Identify a 'buddy' outside of work area
- Be able to have time away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques
- Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises, or going for a walk

Discuss whether the member of staff/student has visited their GP. Depending on the discussion, this may be the next step suggested, particularly if the areas of difficulty are sleeping, panic attacks or anxiety.

If they have visited their GP, and are being supported by them, it may be helpful at this point to make an Occupational Health referral to give specific advice regarding the workplace. For students a referral should then be made to Student Services

Appendix 2

Menopause Advice Sheet – How to talk to your GP about menopause

If you are suffering from menopausal symptoms to the point they're getting in the way of you enjoying life, it's time to talk to your doctor. But, sometimes, that's easier said than done.

We all know how difficult it can often be just to get an appointment, and then it's often only ten minutes. And talking about symptoms can be hard, let alone if you feel rushed or unprepared. So, what can you do? We've put together some helpful, straightforward tips to help you get the best from your appointment.

Don't wait. It is all too common for women to feel they must simply 'put up' with menopausal symptoms as a part of life, but if they are affecting you, there are things you can do, and support available. There is no need to wait until symptoms feel unbearable.

Read the NICE guidelines. This stands for National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and these guidelines are what your doctor will use to determine the type of conversations to have with you and treatments to offer. There are guidelines for patients, which are really useful to read before you see your GP, so you know what to expect.

Prepare for your appointment. It's easier for your doctor to understand what's going on if you provide them with all the information. That may sound obvious, but blood tests to say where you are on the menopause transition aren't always available or accurate – your hormones can fluctuate daily during this time. So, your doctor will be thinking about what to recommend for you, based on your symptoms.

Keep a list of your symptoms, your menstrual cycle, hot flushes, how you're feeling, and any changes you've noticed. Write them down and take them to your appointment. Your doctor will thank you for it, and it's more likely that together, you'll find the right solution faster. And, if you have any preferences about how you manage your symptoms, tell them that too – for example, if you'd like to try hormone replacement therapy (HRT), or not.

Ask the receptionist which doctor is best to talk to about menopause. They are often the font of all knowledge at a surgery and can help you find the best person to speak to – it might not be your usual GP, it could be someone who has had special training in the subject.

Ask for a longer appointment. If you don't think your standard appointment will be long enough, try to book a double appointment, as some surgeries do offer this.

Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion. If you don't feel you've received the help you need, ask to speak to someone else. Don't be put off, you know how you're feeling, and how it's affecting you.

Ask if there is a menopause clinic in your area. Occasionally, there are regional clinics, specifically devoted to menopause. If there is one in your area, and you think this would be helpful, ask for a referral.

Take your partner or a friend with you. It is always helpful to have someone with you at the appointment. Further, your partner, or a friend, may know how the symptoms are affecting you, and may themselves have some questions. They could support you at the appointment, help you assimilate any feedback received, and also find out how they can continue supporting you.

What to expect from your doctor.

There are certain things a GP should – and should not – do during your appointment.

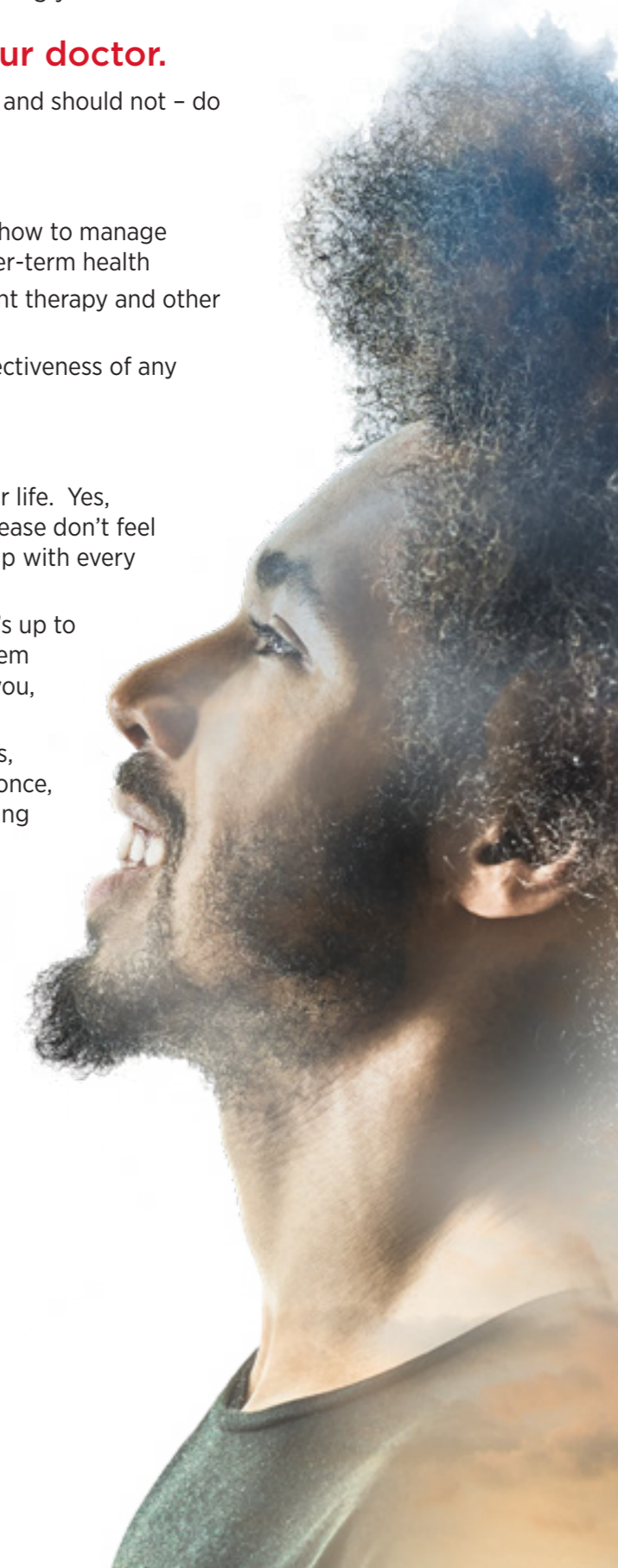
They should:

- Talk to you about your lifestyle, and how to manage both your symptoms, and your longer-term health
- Offer advice on hormone replacement therapy and other non-medical options
- Talk to you about the safety and effectiveness of any treatment

They should not:

- Tell you that it's just that time of your life. Yes, menopause is a natural stage, but please don't feel that means you should have to put up with every symptom without help
- Tell you they don't prescribe HRT. It's up to you what you want to try, and for them to say whether it could be right for you, depending on your medical history
- Impose unnecessary time restrictions, such as they will only prescribe this once, or for a year or two. This is an ongoing conversation, and if your symptoms persist, you will still need help to manage them

Remember, your GP is there to help and support you, and you should feel comfortable and confident in talking to them about your symptoms, and any help you need. Don't think you have to struggle through menopause when there is help and support available.





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