

# Menopause: Supporting guidance for all colleagues

UK and Digital Intelligence



# Introduction

In line with our ambition to create an inclusive workplace in which everyone is enabled to be their best, we are committed to supporting employees who are affected by the menopause. We recognise that this support can make a big difference for individuals and the wider organisation, including:

- > Enabling people to be at their best at work – reducing absence and increasing productivity
- > Helping to create an inclusive culture in which everyone can be themselves
- > Increasing employee engagement
- > Attracting and retaining more people who are under-represented in our industry

This guide aims to raise awareness of menopause related issues at work, increase understanding of the potential impact on those experiencing the menopause and signpost support. It has sections to support individuals who are experiencing menopause symptoms themselves, line managers, and anyone who wants to support someone else experiencing the menopause.

## A note on gender expression or identity

We recognise that not everyone experiencing the menopause will identify or express themselves as a 'female' or 'male'. People who are non-binary, transgender, or people who are intersex and may not identify as female or male, may also experience menopausal symptoms. This guidance applies to anyone experiencing the menopause regardless of their gender expression or identity.

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# Contents

Click on each of these areas to find out more.

# Section 1 – Overview

About the menopause and why we're committed to being a menopause friendly employer.



# What is the menopause?



The menopause is, in the majority of cases, a natural phase of life when a person stops menstruating and experiences hormonal changes, such as a decrease in oestrogen and progesterone levels. It can also be brought on by medical reasons such as surgery.

It usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 and typically lasts between four and eight years, although it can last longer and symptoms can begin before the age of 40. Every experience is different.

There are typically three stages of the menopause transition:

Stage 1: Perimenopause	Stage 2: Menopause	Stage 3: Postmenopause
The time leading up to the menopause when a person may experience menopausal symptoms. This can start years before the menopause.	This usually occurs when a person has not had a period for 12 consecutive months or more.	The time after menopause has occurred. A person may still experience symptoms for many years.
Duration: Average 5-7 years	Duration: 1 day event	Duration: Rest of life

## 51 years

The average age to reach the menopause in the UK

## 4 - 8 Years

Symptoms of the menopause usually last between 4-8 years

## 1 in 100

will reach menopause before they are 40

# Why we're committed to being a menopause-friendly employer

With life expectancy increasing, more people are working through their 50s and 60s and beyond, which means more people are working while experiencing perimenopause, menopause and post menopause.

For some people, the menopause can naturally occur early or for medical reasons such as surgery, hysterectomy, chemotherapy, aromatase inhibitors (oestrogen suppressants) and treatment for endometriosis.

At whatever age and for whatever reason, going through the menopause can mean managing the demands of work and home life whilst also dealing with sometimes severe symptoms and other related issues.

Many people who experience symptoms worry whether the effects of the menopause might lead to negative judgements about their capability at work and whether that might affect their chances of progression.

**8 in 10** people who are going through the menopause are in work.

We want to make sure that anyone experiencing the menopause while working at BAE Systems knows there is information and guidance available to them, and feels able to seeking the support they need in an understanding environment.

We want everyone to feel comfortable talking about the menopause more openly in the workplace, and at home, and give individuals the confidence to seek or offer support.

This reflects our ambition to create an inclusive workplace in which everyone feels able to be themselves, everyone is treated with dignity and respect, and everyone is supported to be their best.

We know that raising awareness and understanding among line managers and colleagues is key to creating an inclusive and supportive environment for people going through the menopause, and that many colleagues will benefit from this increased understanding as they support partners, friends and relatives who are experiencing the menopause.



# What are the symptoms of the menopause?

Hormonal changes can result in a wide range of symptoms, both physical and psychological including, but not limited to:

Physical Symptoms	Psychological Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Hot flushes during the day and night</li><li>&gt; Excessive sweating</li><li>&gt; Trouble sleeping/insomnia</li><li>&gt; Fatigue</li><li>&gt; Hair/skin changes/irritation</li><li>&gt; Headaches/migraines</li><li>&gt; Joint and muscle stiffness</li><li>&gt; Irregular, light or heavy periods</li><li>&gt; Weight gain</li><li>&gt; Aches and pains</li><li>&gt; Urinary issues, e.g. increased frequency</li><li>&gt; Loss of libido</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Mood swings</li><li>&gt; Feeling low/depressed</li><li>&gt; Stress</li><li>&gt; Tearful</li><li>&gt; Nervousness, worry or anxiety</li><li>&gt; Brain fog</li><li>&gt; Problems with memory recall</li><li>&gt; Reduced concentration/focus levels</li><li>&gt; Loss of confidence</li></ul>

Research suggests that symptoms may differ amongst certain ethnic groups. Ethnic differences in some symptoms include aches in the back of neck and skull, soreness, palpitations, severe backache and frequently feeling nervous or tense.

We encourage colleagues to seek help and support early and ahead of symptoms becoming really bad or severe.



# What is the male menopause?

The 'male menopause' (sometimes called the andropause) is not the same as the female menopause. While menopause occurs for affects all people with female reproductive organs at some point in their life, andropause occurs in only a portion of those with male reproductive organs.

Andropause is also more commonly clinically referred to as testosterone deficiency syndrome, androgen deficiency and hypogonadism. Andropause occurs due to testosterone levels falling as men age. The decline is steady at less than 2% a year from around the age of 30 to 40. Testosterone levels can also decline due to medications and lifestyle choices.

In many cases, unlike the menopause, the symptoms are nothing to do with hormones. Contributing factors associated with the male menopause include, but are not limited to:

Lifestyle	Physical	Psychological
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; A poor diet</li><li>&gt; Drinking too much alcohol</li><li>&gt; Lack of exercise</li><li>&gt; Smoking</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Lack of sleep</li><li>&gt; Reduction of bone density</li><li>&gt; Muscle loss</li><li>&gt; Weight gain</li><li>&gt; Gynecomastia</li><li>&gt; Night Sweats</li><li>&gt; Fatigue</li><li>&gt; Low libido</li><li>&gt; Erectile dysfunction</li><li>&gt; Poor sexual performance</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Low self-esteem</li><li>&gt; Loss of motivation</li><li>&gt; Irritability and mood swings</li><li>&gt; Memory loss</li><li>&gt; Lack of concentration</li></ul>

If you are experiencing any of these, it is important to talk to your doctor to determine their cause. We also recommend speaking to your line manager about what support and reasonable adjustments you may need.





# Section 2 – Guidance for anyone experiencing the menopause

What to do if you're experiencing menopause symptoms.



# Talking to your GP or medical practitioner

It's always recommended that you go to your GP or medical practitioner if you're experiencing menopausal symptoms.

Your GP can discuss options with you, including hormone replacement therapy (HRT), and advise on any lifestyle changes which could help. They should also be able to advise you on complementary treatments, including herbal remedies.

Getting what's right for you from an appointment with your GP is very important. So a little preparation will go a long way in helping you make the most of it.

- > A good place to start is to ask who's the best GP in the practice to talk to about the menopause.
- > Consider asking for a longer appointment – explaining to the receptionist can help them allocate the appropriate time.
- > Ahead of the appointment, record your symptoms (frequency and duration) and detail your menstrual cycle history, if that's appropriate for you.
- > Make notes of how your symptoms are affecting you and how you're attempting to manage them.
- > Review the NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) guidelines – GPs use these to help people manage their menopause. You can find a link to these at the end of this guide.
- > Research the facts on up-to-date, trusted websites, and think about ways you would like to manage not just your menopause symptoms but your long-term health. You'll find some suggested resources at the end of this guide.
- > Consider taking your partner or a close friend with you. They will know how the symptoms are affecting you and could support you at the appointment, they can also find out how to continue supporting 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.
- > 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.

# Lifestyle considerations

Everyone's experience of menopause is different – each person will have different symptoms, different views or philosophies around how to we'd manage them and different medical histories.

Your GP or medical practitioner should be able to take you through the different options and also advise you on general lifestyle considerations that can help you manage your symptoms.

A healthy lifestyle can have a positive impact on both menopausal symptoms and long-term health, so it's important to consider lifestyle changes during and after the menopause. Be informed and take time to read up on what to expect and what will happen but most of all take control and make positive lifestyle changes.

There are some general points to consider on the following page.



# Lifestyle considerations – continued

- > Smokers tend to have an earlier menopause, and smoking can also worsen hot flushes – possibly due to the effects of nicotine.
- > Alcohol is a common trigger for hot flushes and can encourage other symptoms, such as headaches and mood swings.
- > Being overweight can exacerbate many menopause symptoms, as well as put you at increased risk of serious illness. Taking regular exercise may hold the key to keeping your weight in check, as well as regulating your mood. Activities such as regular yoga can reduce hot flushes and improve concentration, sleep and pain levels. Finding an activity you enjoy will help make it easier to stick to.
- > Aim to go to bed at the same time each night; switch off the TV and all electronic devices at least an hour before bedtime; keep your bedroom cool, use cotton sheets and wear lighter clothes in bed to prevent night sweats.
- > Enjoying a varied healthy diet is important for everyone, and particularly during and post menopause. A healthy, well-balanced diet means eating food from a variety of food groups to get the energy and nutrients that your body needs.
- > Cut down on caffeine as this can trigger and worsen hot flushes and night sweats, and because it's a stimulant, it can also contribute to insomnia, irritability and mood swings. Aim to limit your intake of caffeine throughout the day, and steer clear of caffeinated drinks completely in the evenings.
- > Connect with your friends. Emotional closeness between friends boosts levels of the hormone progesterone, which reduces anxiety and stress. It's good to talk about what you're experiencing, and they may be going through the same issues.
- > Reach out for help and don't just ignore your symptoms and hope it'll go away. If you're finding it difficult to cope with any aspect of menopause speak to your GP or health practitioner as soon as possible. There are medical options (HRT) as well as non-medical options (CBT, Acupuncture, Aromatherapy, Reflexology, and Herbal Remedies).

# Talking to your manager

We know it might be hard to talk to your manager about how menopause is affecting you. But remember, your manager is there to help you be at your best at work and an open, honest conversation is the best starting point. To help you both, it's a good idea to prepare for your conversation, this will result in a much better conversation and outcome for both of you.

- > Keep a diary of your menopause symptoms and how they're affecting you at work.
- > Think about what practical, reasonable adjustments might help address these symptoms at work, being flexible and ideally coming up with some different options – see reasonable adjustment examples in Section 3 of this guide. These may only be needed for a short period of time while you work with your medical professional to alleviate your symptoms.
- > Put some time in the diary, making sure you have sufficient time and a confidential environment to talk. If you feel able, let your manager know you in advance that you want to talk about the effects of the menopause. This will give them the chance to research, read this guide and take our line manager training, so they understand some of the issues and options and are ready to support you.
- > Talk about how menopause is affecting you at work, what you're doing to manage your symptoms and what your line manager could do to help. Discuss what support you would like e.g. reasonable adjustments and timescales. Remember, this may have been on your mind for a long time, but it may be the first time your manager has considered how they can support someone going through the menopause. Allow them time to digest the information and seek advice if necessary and set up a follow up meeting if needed.
- > Agree next steps. You can record any agreed adjustments or support in a Working Adjustment Passport – see the link at the end of this guide for more details.
- > 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.
- > Put a time in the diary to meet again, whether that's to agree a way forward, to monitor progress or update. Remember menopause symptoms can change over time.

# Section 3 – Guidance for line managers

About the menopause and why we're committed to being a menopause friendly employer.



# Creating a supportive environment

It can be hard when you suspect someone is experiencing menopause symptoms but they haven't talked to you. There may be a number of reasons why some people will find it difficult to have a conversation about how the menopause is impacting them, perhaps due to their gender, age, religion or some other personal reason such as they may be worried they will be seen as not being up to the job, or that this is considered to be a taboo topic and they are therefore embarrassed talking about the symptoms.

If you observe a team member or colleague struggling or not seeming themselves, ask how they are or if there is anything you can help with. Knowing you care and want to support can provide great reassurance and encourage them to take the conversation further. Remember that support is available to you as well – you can contact the Employee Service Centre to talk through any situation you might be facing with a team member.

The easier you make it for someone to open up to you, the easier it will be to identify the support they need. Remember all managers are encouraged to discuss health and wellbeing with employees throughout their employment and talking to your team about the menopause and the support available within the company can be a great way of demonstrating that you care and are open to a conversation.

If an employee raises the issue of menopause with you, then you are expected to listen and support the individual to identify ways in which this can be managed, being mindful of the sensitive and confidential nature of the conversation. If you are unsure of what support you or the company can offer then you should tell them that you will seek

further guidance and arrange a follow up meeting. Remember to consider all requests for support and adjustments sympathetically and consider each case on its own merits taking the individual's needs and the work environment / commitments into consideration.



# Tips on having a supportive conversation about the menopause

One of the most important aspects of your role as a line manager is to help your team members be their best at work.

To help you both explore how you can support someone to be their best as they experience the menopause, preparation is important. This will result in a much better conversation and outcome for both of you. Support can come in a number of different forms: some people may just appreciate an empathic ear, while others may want something more formal. It's also okay not to have all the answers during your first conversation – you can listen and offer reassurance that you will find answers for your next conversation. Here are a few tips:

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Do your research and know the facts – you're not expected to be an expert, and you shouldn't give any medical advice, but knowing the basics will help you understand the potential issues</li><li>&gt; Do follow the guidance in this document</li><li>&gt; Do arrange a time to talk, allowing enough time for a good quality conversation</li><li>&gt; Do make sure the conversation is in a confidential environment – that it can't be overheard</li><li>&gt; Do encourage them to speak openly and honestly</li><li>&gt; Do keep an open mind and be flexible</li><li>&gt; Do ask the individual what they feel might improve their symptoms, or help them manage them in relation to their work</li><li>&gt; Do provide support and focus on the solution and best outcome for all</li><li>&gt; Do ask them whether they want the conversation to be kept confidential or if they would like colleagues to be aware – this is personal medical information, and it's their choice</li><li>&gt; Do refer to HR and Occupational Health, if needed</li><li>&gt; Do encourage them to speak their GP if they have not already done so</li><li>&gt; Do have regular follow up conversations</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Don't make assumptions about the menopause</li><li>&gt; Don't shy away from talking about the menopause</li><li>&gt; Don't share personal information about your team member with others without their consent</li><li>&gt; Don't address performance issues without checking about health concerns</li><li>&gt; Don't offer medical advice</li></ul>



# Examples of reasonable or tailored adjustments

Adjustments can often be small and short term changes, but can make a big difference. Reasonable or tailored adjustments for an individual can include the following (depending on their role and your site):

- > Review of the way their job role is carried out/specific tasks (depending upon the job)
- > Consider offering special leave on days that the employee is experiencing severe symptoms
- > Use of hybrid, flexible and agile working, for example:
  - > A temporary change of work pattern or hours
  - > Reducing travel and considering dialling into meetings.
- > More frequent breaks when needed
- > Allowing time off if an employee cannot carry on working that day
- > Providing a private area where the employee can rest for a while to help manage their symptoms
- > Considerations to lighting, ventilation and temperature control (for example providing a USB fan)
- > Providing access to suitable changing facilities.

Remember the effects of the menopause can change over time and may impact on the adjustments and level of support agreed, so you should review any adjustments regularly to make sure they remain effective.

Agreed adjustments or support should be recorded in a **Working Adjustment Passport** – see the link at the end of this guide for details.



# Section 4 – Guidance for supporting others

Guidance for anyone supporting someone going through the menopause.



# Supporting someone going through the menopause

Talking openly about the menopause to your partner, someone you're close to or a colleague is often the best way to support them. Finding out how they are feeling and talking honestly about how you might be feeling, if their experience is affecting you, can make a big difference. If you are finding it difficult to start that conversation, you could consider using this guide as a conversation opener. Simply showing you care and being patient and supportive can be a huge help, but you could also use the tips here to help offer the support your partner or family member needs during their experience of menopause.

- > Read up on the facts. The more you know about what your partner, family member or colleague is experiencing, the better you can empathise with and support them. The information in this guide will give you a basic understanding of what someone might be experiencing. But you may choose to do further research, using if so use only reputable organisations offering factual information. There are some suggestions in Section 5 of this guide.
- > Reach out to them. Even if communication doesn't come naturally to you, giving them a safe space to talk openly about how they are feeling will help make their experience better. You could simply try asking "What's the best thing I can do to help you?"
- > Don't make assumptions. It's important to appreciate that everyone is different. Each individual will have different symptoms (some don't have any), views on how they wish to manage them or how much they want to talk about it. Showing you care, understand and want to support can make a big difference. Small gestures or a simple 'How are you?' or 'What can I do to help?' is often enough.
- > Be patient. This can be a really trying time and the person experiencing menopause needs to work through it in their own time and their own way. The menopause can make someone feel fragile, overwhelmed and 'not themselves', sometimes for a period of years. Your understanding and support is more important than ever!
- > Offer your support. You might not be able to take away their symptoms, but there are other things you can do to help ease pressures they might be feeling. Asking how they are, making a cup of tea, or running a relaxing bath can really help. Kindness, honesty and empathy can make a difference to you both during this time and can make a huge difference when you or they are feeling overwhelmed.
- > Support their interests. Encourage them to pursue things that make them feel good. If they want to learn something new or join the gym, do what you can to make it easy for them. This will help improve their wellbeing.
- > Encourage them to seek help and consult their doctor. For some people, just making the appointment can be a major hurdle – anxiety during menopause can be crippling and self-confidence can simply disappear. You could offer to attend appointments with them for support.
- > Make sure they know where to find information and support. Share some of the resources suggested at the end of this guide and support them in finding any additional support they feel they would benefit from.

# Section 5 – Information and support

Where you can find further information, and support available within the Company.



# Where to get additional support within BAE Systems

## Employee Resource Groups

Friendly and supportive, our ERGs are there to support anyone, but particularly those who belong to under-represented groups and who may be facing additional struggles.

## Pause For Thought Group

The group supports employees affected by the menopause directly or indirectly and encourages members to share knowledge and information and support one another.

## Useful resources

## Employee Service Centre

Telephone: 0208 068 2866

## Working Adjustments Passport

The Working Adjustments Passport is a live record of workplace adjustments and support discussed and agreed between any employee and their manager – regardless of an employee's physical, mental or personal circumstance.

## Useful resources



# Other sources of information

NHS information

