

Introduction

As a caring and responsible employer, George Watson's College ("the School") understands that the menopause and its symptoms can affect any of its staff, including women, trans and intersex people going through the menopause, and the people supporting someone going through the menopause, including partners, relatives, managers and work colleagues.

Although it is a natural stage in most women's lives, we recognise that menopause is a significant health and wellbeing concern for a number of our staff, and that affected employees will experience it in different ways. It is estimated that between 75-80% of menopausal women are in work in the UK, and research studies have shown that menopause symptoms can have a significant impact on both work attendance and performance. It is therefore vitally important that we have a practical, informative, and robust policy in place to fully support them in the workplace and provide guidance and advice for their line managers and colleagues.

Policy Aims

The aims of this Policy are as follows:

- To support staff experiencing menopausal symptoms and help them minimise the impact it can have on them whilst at work
- To inform all staff and line managers/Heads of Department about the menopause and potential impact of symptoms so that they are able to support work colleagues experiencing symptoms of the menopause
- To clearly define what help and support is available within George Watson's College for staff experiencing menopausal symptoms, and their line managers
- To create an environment where colleagues feel confident and comfortable enough to openly start conversations and engage in discussions about menopause, including raising issues about their symptoms or asking for support or reasonable adjustments
- To encourage better attendance, engagement, and retention by being a caring employer committed to supporting the needs of employees during menopause.

Scope

This Policy and associated appendices applies to all staff and line managers employed by George Watson's College.

Definitions

Menopause is a natural stage of life which affects around half of the population including women, and trans and intersex people. For the purposes of this Policy and the associated procedures, we have provided the following definitions:

Perimenopause: the time leading up to the menopause when a woman may experience changes, such as irregular periods or other menopausal symptoms.

Menopause: is defined as the biological stage in a woman's life that occurs when her periods stop and she reaches the end of her natural reproductive life. Usually, it is defined as when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months, for women reaching menopause naturally. The average age for a woman to reach menopause is 51 in the UK, however it can be earlier or later than this for a number of reasons including surgery or illness.

Postmenopause: is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months.

Although the policy and associated procedures refer to "menopause" and "menopausal", this should be read to cover any of the three key stages of menopause transition defined above.

General Principles

The following general principles apply to the Menopause at Work Policy:

- The School will respect each employee's individual experience of the menopause and ensure that all staff are treated fairly
- The School will promote a greater understanding of the menopause and seek to eradicate any exclusionary or discriminatory practices
- The School will seek to support staff who choose to disclose that they are experiencing the menopause, their managers and colleagues, and try to reduce the potential impact (e.g. of symptoms) in the workplace
- The School is committed to ensuring that conditions in the workplace do not make menopausal symptoms worse and that appropriate reasonable adjustments are fairly considered
- Discussions will be handled sensitively and confidentially, with input or advice from HR, Occupational Health, or other specialists, as required.

Relevant Legislation

There is no detailed employment legislation specifically designed to cover menopause; however, the following Acts and Regulations should be considered relevant:

- Equality Act 2010
- Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974
- The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992

Other Relevant Policies

- Flexible Working Policy
- Agile Working Policy
- Sickness Absence Management Policy and Procedures
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Health and Wellbeing Policy (Staff)
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policies, Guidance and Procedures
- Grievance Policy and Procedures

Effective Date

The Menopause at Work Policy and associated procedures are effective from **June 2023**.

Approval and Review

The Head of Human Resources is the owner of this policy.

The Menopause at Work Policy has been approved by the Staff Committee of the Governing Council, following endorsement by the Principal's Leadership Team and ICE Committee.

In line with the agreed schedule, the School will review the Menopause at Work Policy at least every two years, or as soon as practicable after any change of relevant legislation, to ensure that the policy and associated procedures continue to comply with current employment legislation and to meet the School's operational needs.

Date of next review: Summer 2025

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Menopause Information and Support
- Appendix 2 Responsibilities
- Appendix 3 External sources of support and advice

Version 1/Issue 1/June 2023

Appendix 1

Menopause Information and Support

Introduction

Menopause is a natural part of a woman's life, and it isn't always an easy transition; however, with the right support, it can be much better. Whilst every woman does not suffer with symptoms, we recognise that supporting those who do will improve their experience at work.

Menopause should not be taboo or "hidden". We want everyone at George Watson's College to understand what menopause is, and be able to talk about it openly and without embarrassment. Menopause is not just an issue for women; men should be aware too.

The information in this appendix is shared with the intention of raising awareness and understanding about menopause and clarifying the internal sources of help and support we have available (i.e. for staff, their line managers/Heads of Department, work colleagues, and any employee supporting someone going through the menopause).

Staff experiencing the menopause

The School recognises that not everyone experiencing the menopause will identify or express themselves as a woman. People who are non-binary, trans or intersex, and who may not identify as a woman, may also experience menopausal symptoms. Although we generally refer to women in this document, this policy and associated appendices apply to anyone experiencing the menopause, regardless of their gender expression or identity.

Menopausal transition

Generally speaking, there are three key stages to menopausal transition.

The perimenopause is the stage in a woman's life when she starts to experience hormonal fluctuations and changes to her periods. The average time for a woman to be perimenopausal is four to five years, but it can be much shorter or longer. For some women, the symptoms during this time are worse than the actual menopause.

A woman is described as being menopausal when she has gone 12 months without a period and when her ovaries are no longer responsive. The average age for a woman to reach menopause is 51 in the UK, however it can be earlier or later than this for a number of reasons including surgery or illness, such as cancer. It is estimated that around 1 in every 100 women will experience a premature menopause (i.e. before the age of 40 and sometimes referred to as premature ovarian insufficiency or POI).

The post-menopausal period is defined as the time after menopause has occurred, starting when the woman has not had a period for 12 months. According to the NHS, the average time for women experiencing symptoms after menopause is four years after their last period, but around 10% will continue to experience symptoms for up to 12 years, and 3% of women will experience symptoms for the rest of their lives. Post-menopausal women have an increased risk of osteoporosis, heart disease, and diabetes.

Signs and symptoms

Menopausal symptoms can have a huge effect on a woman's comfort and performance at work, and can last for many years. Some women experience very few symptoms, whereas others experience many. Some experience such severe symptoms that it impacts negatively on their home and working lives. Symptoms may also vary over time, so some women may find their hot flushes and sweats improve, and then they develop other symptoms such as low mood, anxiety and fatigue. Some women may also suffer with conditions that are exacerbated by the menopause, e.g. osteoarthritis and migraine.

We have provided lists below of some of the physical and mental signs and symptoms that women may experience during their menopausal transition (i.e. during both perimenopause and menopause). These lists are not exhaustive.

Vasomotor symptoms (i.e. heat regulation)

Hot flushes
Night sweats

Physical signs and symptoms

Changes to periods - e.g. heavier/lighter periods; no, more frequent, or infrequent periods
Vaginal dryness, soreness
Breast soreness
Joint and muscle stiffness, soreness
Headaches
Feeling dizzy or faint
Heart palpitations
Difficulty in sleeping, poor sleep quality, feeling tired or lacking in energy
Dry or itchy (creeping) skin, thinning hair, brittle nails
Dry mouth and eyes, burning tongue, metallic taste in the mouth, sore gums
Feeling a need to urinate more often, leaks of urine, stress incontinence, UTIs
Breathing difficulties
Tinnitus
Weight gain from hormonal changes

Psychological signs and symptoms

Low mood
Feeling unhappy or depressed
Crying spells, irritability, mood swings (uncharacteristic, emotional behaviour)
Anxiety, panic attacks
Brain fog, memory problems (loss and lapses)
Difficulty with/loss of concentration
Loss of confidence (including in skills and abilities)
Reduced self-esteem
Loss of interest in most things
Loss of interest in sex and/or level of arousal

Talking to your manager

We understand that some people might not want to talk about their menopause symptoms at work. For example, some people may feel that it's a private/personal matter, that they feel their symptoms might be embarrassing to share with others, or worry that they might be seen as less able to do their job. As a school community, we are committed to ensuring that all our employees understand what menopause is, and would encourage everyone to talk about it openly and without embarrassment.

There is no obligation for employees to disclose they are experiencing menopause. However, if they feel comfortable doing so, they are encouraged to speak to their line manager/Head of Department at an early stage to inform them that they are experiencing menopausal symptoms. An open, informal discussion is the easiest way to ensure that any support or reasonable adjustments which might help lessen the impact of symptoms in the workplace can be put in place quickly.

Alternatively, if an employee doesn't feel that they can have the conversation with their line manager, they are always welcome to speak with a member of the HR Team or the Staff Association. However, line managers should always be involved in agreeing to any changes, even if the employee has an initial conversation with someone else.

Reasonable adjustments for symptom support

Depending on the menopausal symptoms a woman may be experiencing, whether physical or psychological, there are a wide variety of simple changes that could be made at work to help lessen the impact of those symptoms, including a number of adjustments that can make a positive difference across multiple symptoms.

We understand that not all of the examples/suggestions of possible adjustments that we have provided below for some of the most common symptoms will be suitable or possible for every role across the School. We appreciate, for example, that teachers and certain support roles will have less flexibility in terms of break times or the ability to amend their working hours.

This is not an exhaustive or comprehensive list and support and adjustments at work should always be discussed, considered, and implemented on a case-by-case basis to best support the employee's individual circumstances. Further advice and support is available from the HR Team, as required.

- **Hot flushes:** providing a desk fan, moving desks to beside a window or away from a heat source, providing easy access to cold drinking water, adapting uniform requirements, allowing access to a quiet area
- **Changes to periods:** ensuring easy access to toilet/washroom facilities, allow for more frequent breaks with cover available (if required)
- **Sleep disturbance/fatigue:** temporary adjustment to working hours, amended start times, flexible working arrangements (either via informal/local adjustments or the [Flexible Working Policy](#)), adapting absence management triggers, supportive management-led conversations
- **Headaches:** ensure access to natural light and ability to adjust artificial light, allowing access to a quiet area, conducting DSE (Display Screen Equipment) checks
- **Psychological:** (i.e. loss of confidence, mood changes, depression, anxiety, panic attacks) do a stress risk assessment, consider flexible/agile working, encourage networking with colleagues experiencing similar issues, providing access to a quiet area, supportive management-led conversations, exploring the possibility/value of CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy), adapting absence management triggers
- **Psychological:** (i.e. memory problems, brain fog, loss of concentration) temporary reduction in workload with assurances that the employee will not be penalised because of this, encouraging additional use of technology (e.g. setting reminders on Google), providing additional time to complete tasks, consider flexible/agile working, supportive management-led conversations

Sickness absence

An employee may feel unwell, or unfit for work, due to menopausal symptoms, and the School will fully support them in such circumstances, in line with our [Sickness Absence Management Policy](#). This support includes situations where there may be a sudden onset of menopausal symptoms during their working day. We recognise that in some cases, temporarily amending the absence triggers noted in our Sickness Absence Management Policy may be a useful reasonable adjustment to support an employee during their menopause transition.

Whether their menopause transition is resulting in absence from work or not, the School would always encourage employees to speak with their own GP at the earliest opportunity about any menopausal symptoms which are impacting their health and wellbeing or adversely affecting their home and/or working lives.

Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

The School has an Employee Assistance Programme which gives employees access to a round-the-clock, free and confidential service which can offer help with any personal, work-related, or family issues they may be facing. The EAP offers information resources, advice, support, and counselling, in relation to a wide variety of issues and health and wellbeing matters, including menopause. Staff, and their line managers, can access EAP support online in the "lifestyle support" section of mybenefits@GWC accessed via the Staff Benefits button on the Staff Portal, or by calling their freephone helpline on 0808 168 2143.

Occupational Health

To help support its positive approach to absence management and employee health and wellbeing, the School retains the services of an Occupational Health provider. If an employee is adversely affected by their menopausal symptoms, leading to either short or long term absences, they may be asked to attend an appointment with Occupational Health. The medical report that Occupational Health then provides could help the School better understand the employee's symptoms or medical conditions and adopt reasonable adjustments or workplace strategies to assist the employee manage their menopause at work and/or improve their attendance. Further advice and information about Occupational Health is available from the HR Team, as required.

Flexible and Agile Working

Flexible working describes any working arrangement where the number of hours, time or place where work is undertaken is varied from standard practice, and where any agreed change results in a contractual change (either temporary or permanent). The School has a [Flexible Working Policy](#) which provides all the information about possible options and the application process. Similarly, the School has an [Agile Working Policy](#) which may be helpful if some flexibility of work location is required on a more informal basis.

Depending on an employee's personal circumstances, they may wish to explore either Agile Working or Flexible Working to see if changes in how/where they work could help support them through their menopause transition. Both these policies can be found on the Staff Portal and additional information is available from the HR team.

Appendix 2

Responsibilities

Employees and colleagues are responsible for:

- Taking a personal responsibility to look after their own health and wellbeing, including accessing GP/medical advice and treatment to help manage any effects of the menopause (where appropriate)
- Familiarising themselves with this policy and the associated guidance
- Contributing to a respectful and productive workplace
- Being open and honest in conversations with their line managers/Heads of Department/HR
- Speaking directly to HR/another manager about support, if they feel unable to speak to their own line manager/Head of Department (or if their manager is not supporting them)
- Updating their manager/HR if symptoms change over time or adjustments are no longer required
- Being understanding of any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.

Line managers/Heads of Department are responsible for:

- Taking a pastoral/managerial responsibility for every member of their team in relation to their health and wellbeing at work
- Familiarising themselves with this policy and the associated guidance
- Being ready to have open discussions about menopause, understanding the personal nature of any conversation, and treating and individual/associated discussion sensitively and professionally
- Discussing in practical terms how individuals can best be supported at work, mindful of any reasonable adjustments that may be required, and any impact on the wider team
- Recording and actioning any reasonable adjustments that are agreed, reviewing them through on-going dialogue, and ensuring that they are adhered to
- Engaging with the HR Team, Occupational Health etc, if required.

HR Team are responsible for:

- Offering guidance to all employees on the interpretation of this policy, reviewing the policy and appendices on a regular basis
- Supporting individual employees and their line managers/Heads of Department, as required (e.g. attending meetings, providing additional information about possible reasonable adjustments etc)
- Maintaining an effective Employee Assistance Programme and ensuring that all employees are aware of the support available
- Liaise with the School's Occupational Health provider if additional input is required in individual cases
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the policy in relation to absence, performance, etc

Appendix 3

External sources of support and advice

NHS Inform

NHS Inform is Scotland's national health information service. Their aim is to provide people in Scotland with accurate and relevant information to help them make informed decisions about their own health and the health of the people they care for. There is a section on their website dedicated to menopause:

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/womens-health/late-years-around-50-years-and-over/menopause-and-post-menopause-health/menopause>

Menopause Support

Menopause Support is a not for profit community interest company supporting the national #MakeMenopauseMatter campaign, and providing information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms, and treatment options:

<https://menopausesupport.co.uk/>

NHS Help and Support

UK NHS website providing help and support, with access to videos about other people's experiences of menopause and perimenopause:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/help-and-support/>

The Menopause Charity

Charity working with individuals experiencing menopause, as well as healthcare professionals and employers. They offer evidence-based information, advice and support, and accredited training, and have a number of high profile/celebrity campaigning ambassadors:

<https://www.themenopausecharity.org/>

Hempicked - including Menopause Hub and Menopause in the Workplace

Hempicked started in 2013 as an online space for women to share their wisdom and offer guidance, support and tips on a wide range of topics. They provide lots of information about the menopause in their Menopause Hub, as well as information tailored to the workplace, and "lunch and learn" videos :

<https://hempicked.net/menopause-hub/>

<https://menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk/>

The Daisy Network

A charity which provides support for people experiencing premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency (POI):

<https://www.daisynetwork.org/>