



Corporate Menopause Policy (LGE)

Manager's Guidance

1. How to Approach a Sensitive Conversation

The level of trust you build with employees will determine the extent to which colleagues are able to discuss menopausal symptoms and any support or adjustments they need at work. If you have regular and informal one-to-ones with employees, this can provide the forum for a conversation about any changes to someone's health situation, including the menopause.

The easier you make it for someone to open up to you, the easier it will be to identify the support they need while any health condition can understandably be a sensitive and personal issue for many, some of the symptoms associated with the menopause can manifest themselves in a particularly intimate, even visible, way.

Menopause can affect people's confidence and it can be very daunting talking to someone who has no knowledge/awareness of the menopause. It's therefore understandable why many individuals 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.

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 well-being or performance, ask general, open questions such as, 'How are you doing at the moment?' or 'I've noticed you've been arriving late 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.

The more supportive and knowledgeable you are about the range of menopausal symptoms, the less likely that employees 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 in the organisation will also increase your own confidence in discussing the issue.

Approach conversations with empathy, and try not to be embarrassed by the issue and 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.

It's important to set the right tone when opening a conversation about any sensitive issue. But try not to worry too much – being over-sensitive will stop you from doing or saying anything. Review this checklist before approaching a sensitive conversation:

- Avoid interruptions – switch off phones, ensure colleagues can't walk in and interrupt.
- Ask simple, open, non-judgemental questions.
- Avoid judgemental or patronising responses.

- Speak calmly.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Listen actively and carefully.
- Encourage the employee to talk.
- Give the employee ample opportunity to explain the situation in their own words.
- Show empathy and understanding.
- Be prepared for some silences and be patient.
- Focus on the person, not the problem.
- Avoid making assumptions or being prescriptive

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.

2. Risk Assessments

By carrying out a risk assessment this will help ensure an employee's symptoms are not being exacerbated by their job. Employers have a legal duty to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the workplace risks to the health and safety of their employees.

While a risk assessment will not be required for every menopausal employee, they can be helpful in identifying specific needs of an individual.

Risk assessments should consider the specific needs of menopausal employees and ensure that the working environment will not make their symptoms worse. Often, making simple changes to the working environment can help to alleviate the impact of some symptoms.

Discuss appropriate adjustments as simple changes to someone's role or working environment can help ensure the menopause does not become a barrier to performance. Certain aspects of a job or the workplace can represent a barrier for someone experiencing menopausal symptoms. A risk assessment should look at issues such as:

- Temperature and ventilation
- The materials used in any uniform or corporate clothing
- Access to toilet facilities and access to cold water.

For further advice please review the [Health and Safety Executive's tools and templates](#) for carrying out risk assessments, including how to control risks.

The HSE also has tools to help you carry out a [stress risk assessment](#).

3. How to Manage Health Issues and Performance

If an employee's performance is suffering, it is important to help them address the root cause. In some cases, menopausal symptoms can be so serious that they affect an employee's performance at work. In this situation, it is in everyone's interest to discuss potential adjustments that could help

the individual perform to their full potential. Where there are suspected or known health issues, these should be explored, prior to any formal processes for underperformance.

Performance management should not just be a one-off annual appraisal meeting. It is most effective when it is proactive, informal and based on regular and constructive feedback and discussion. This helps to build trust-based relationships and two-way dialogue, making it easier to address any underlying health issues. If you do not address the root causes of poor performance, any solutions are unlikely to fully resolve the issue – and problems can spiral into sickness absence.

Line Managers should:

- Have regular, informal catch-ups with employees.
- Approach performance conversations supportively and positively.
- Take any health issues fully into account where there is underperformance on the part of an individual and make the necessary reasonable adjustments.
- Identify any extra support or coaching the person may benefit from.
- Set reasonable timescales for improvements.

If, and only after following the guidance above, performance issues still exist the Maximising Performance Policy may be considered. For further advice please contact the HR Case Team on hrcaseteam@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk.