



Independent



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Confidential

Volume 1:
What is Menopause?

Menopause



Focus



advocacy focus

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INTRODUCTION

MENOPAUSE FOCUS

Menopausal women are the fastest growing workforce demographic. Up to 47% of the UK workforce are women. All of whom will go through the menopause.

In a society where workplace norms are shifting to include a bigger focus on employee health and wellbeing; being an employer who understands how the menopause affects women and bringing in policies to reflect this, is of paramount importance. An employer that champions women's health and focuses on their wellbeing at work, will create the right environment and a more engaged and productive workforce.

Menopause can be a taboo subject. It is a subject that until recently was rarely discussed between women themselves, never mind in the workplace. However, it's important to think of menopause as a phase of life – just like puberty or pregnancy - and not an illness. Talking about and 'normalising' the menopause is one of the most helpful things an employer can do to reassure women in the workplace that they are supported and listened to, during what, for many, can be a confusing and stressful time.

Advocacy Focus is committed to supporting women in the workplace and wants every woman experiencing any type of menopause - perimenopause, premature menopause, chemical menopause and surgical menopause – to feel able to share the impact of their menopause on their work and seek out support without fear of stigma, ridicule or losing their jobs. This conversation is long overdue. It needs to be openly discussed and support has to be readily available.

We congratulate you on being a forward thinking employer by downloading our toolkit. It may be you are taking the first steps towards supporting women in your organisation, or you are further developing your menopause policy as part of an overall health and wellbeing strategy. Your commitment to improving the lives of others will reap dividends in your workplace.

It is also important to acknowledge and understand that Menopause also affects other members of society including those in the non-binary community and also transgender men.

TOOLKIT OVERVIEW

Our Menopause Focus toolkit is born from our employee support group, Female Focus, and was initially a selection of shared stories and suggested self-help ideas. As a leading advocacy provider in the North West of England, we are used to advocating for people who may have difficulty communicating their own views and wishes in relation to health and social care matters, so it made perfect sense for us to advocate for women in our workplace.

This toolkit has been designed to help employers understand the impact of menopausal symptoms in the workplace and learn how to better support your female staff members. Our tools section contains suggested action points for you to further develop menopause friendly policies and procedures, training tools to train your managers and self-help tools for you to distribute to your employees. Especially to those who are experiencing the menopause and need additional support.

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Here at Advocacy Focus, over 90% of our workforce are women. We understand the importance of supporting women during all stages of their lives, and especially during the menopause. We show our commitment to our team's health via our health and wellbeing policies and our Wellbeing Team, which actively promotes talking about mental health at work. Our all-female support group, Female Focus, is leading the charge on this important subject matter.

ABOUT THE MENOPAUSE

Menopause is a natural part of ageing which every woman will experience. It's biology! However, every woman will experience it differently. One size does definitely not fit all. Some women may sail through this life transition, just like some people sail through puberty or pregnancy. Some women will have mild to moderate symptoms and some women will experience life changing symptoms of a physical or emotional nature. In fact, It is reported that 10% of women give up work altogether due to symptoms associated with the menopause.

Many people associate the menopause as something that older women go through, or 'the change' as it is often referred. This is not the case for many women. The perimenopause, which is the period of time leading up to the menopause (the cessation of periods) can start when a woman is in her early 40s. Any woman that experiences symptoms before they turn 40 is classed as having an early menopause. Around 1 in 100 women experience symptoms of the menopause before 40 years of age.

PERIMENOPAUSE:

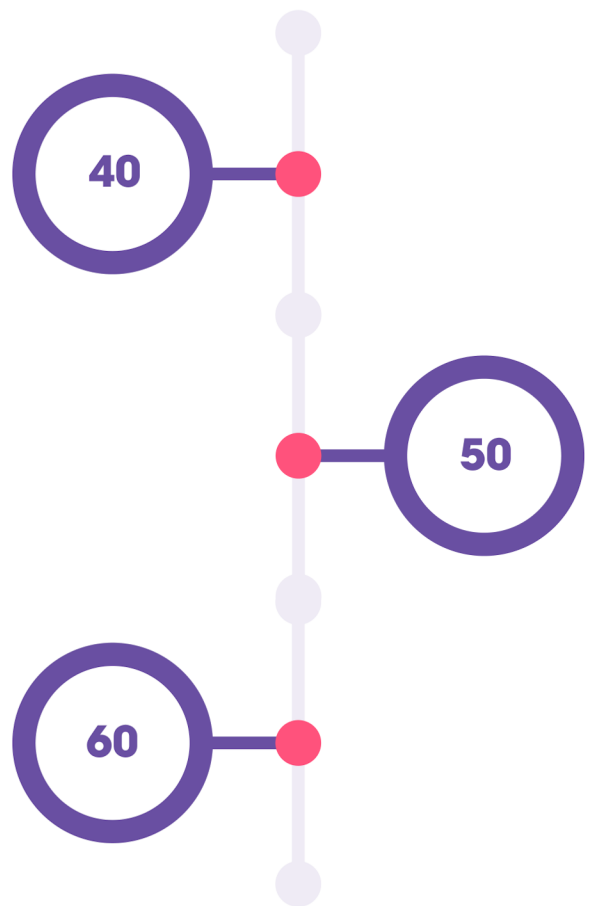
The period of time 'around' menopause. It often starts when a woman is in her early to mid 40s. Anything before this is classed as a woman entering early menopause. It can last for many years.

MENOPAUSE:

The cessation of periods and the woman's monthly cycle. The medical definition is that any woman that has not had a period for one year is classed as being menopausal. The average age for a woman to reach the menopause in the UK is 51. It is a normal, natural event.

POSTMENOPAUSE:

The time after menopause. It can still cause some women to have symptoms as there is a continued decrease in oestrogen levels. Women as old as 60 have reported that they still have hot flushes or experience symptoms such as vaginal dryness. 1 in 10 women will still have symptoms a decade later.



THE SCIENCE BIT

In the five to ten year period before menopause, hormone levels in a woman's body begin to drop. Hormones are the body's communication messengers and they start, stop, speed up or slow down our physical and chemical functions. Women's ovaries produce two key hormones - oestrogen and progesterone - and these control the female reproductive system.

During menopause and over time, the ovaries naturally decrease their production of these hormones which leads to hormonal and biochemical changes in the brain and body. The hormone levels don't tend to drop steadily, they can suddenly spike or dip, triggering unwanted symptoms. These symptoms can be significant and overwhelming for many women and can have an impact on their personal lives and relationships and their performance in the workplace.

Alongside carer responsibilities, potential relationship problems (some brought on by the impact of the menopause), money pressures or even 'empty nest' syndrome, the journey to menopause can have a significant impact on a woman's mental health and wellbeing. For many years, women in England aged between 50 and 54 had the highest suicide rate for women. Statistics gathered in 2018 highlight that women between the ages of 45-49 are now most at risk and this age group has seen an increase of 39.4%. It may be no coincidence that this is the peak age for perimenopausal symptoms to manifest.

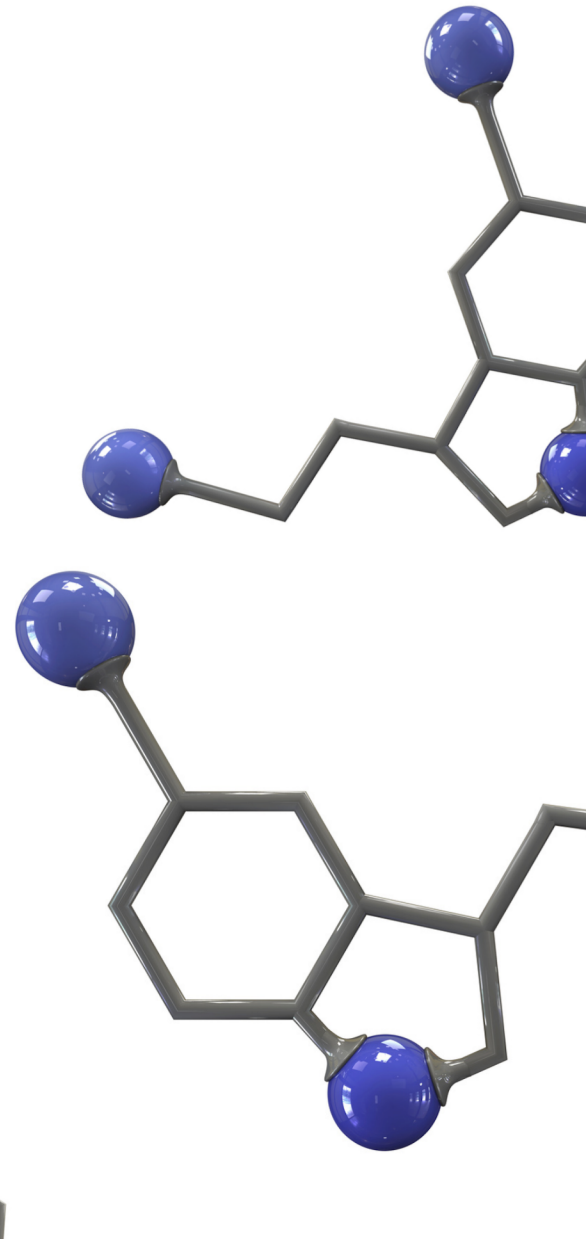
DIFFERENT STAGES AND TYPES OF MENOPAUSE

STAGES OF MENOPAUSE

- Perimenopause – the 4 -10 years before the occurrence of the menopause
- Menopause – the cessation of menstruation
- Post menopause – the years that follow menopause

TYPES OF MENOPAUSE

- Natural – happens as part of the ageing process
- Premature or early menopause – menopause before the age of 40
- Induced menopause:
 - Chemical menopause: menopause induced by chemotherapy, chemicals or medications
 - Surgical menopause: menopause induced by surgery such as surgery to remove the ovaries.

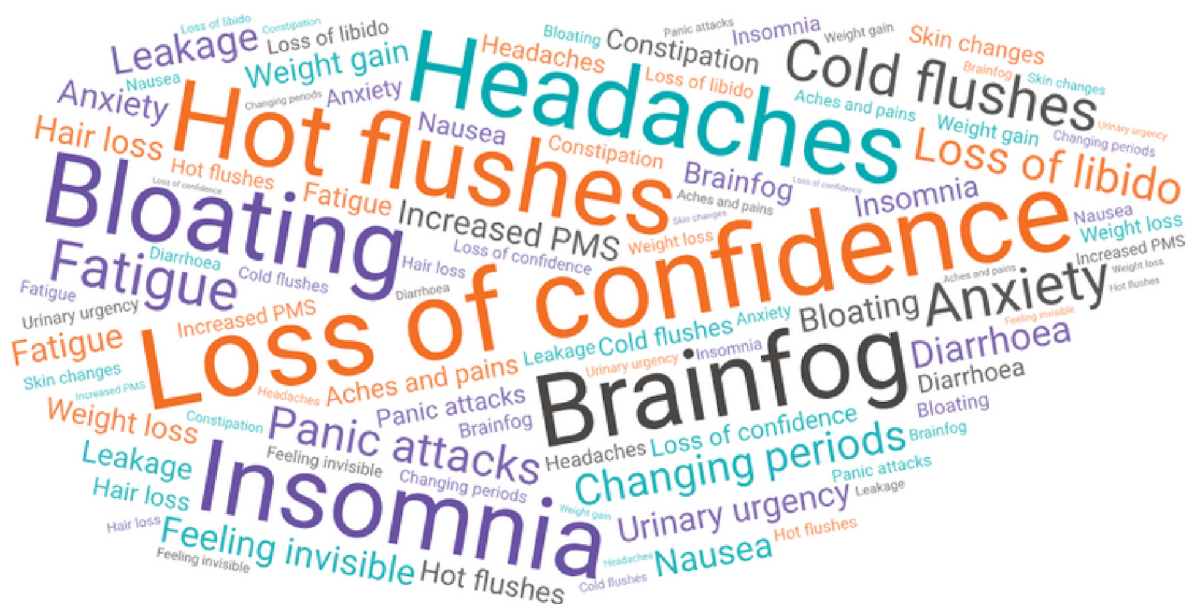


COMMON SYMPTOMS OF THE PERIMENOPAUSE

Around 80% of women have symptoms related to menopause, with only 20% of women reporting that they reached menopause with little or no signs. Symptoms last an average of four years, however, around one in 10 women experience them for up to 12 years.

Many women experience symptoms, but don't realise it's related to the onset of menopause (see Justine's story). Over time some women even believe they have a terminal illness or that they are developing a life changing condition such as dementia.

There are some common reported issues that can affect a woman's ability to function on a day to day basis.



Too hot, too cold
I can't sleep.
Covers on, covers off.
Want to weep.

Brain fog. Can't think.
Neuro-blank.
Energy, zero.
Empty tank.

Confidence waning.
Fear I'm gonna fail.
Mind backfiring.
Chasing own tail.

Memory, terrible
Backlog chores.
Welcome to my
Perimenopause!



MENOPAUSE AFTER A HYSTERECTOMY



Due to me having had a hysterectomy aged 40, it wasn't obvious when I approached menopause. In fact, I wasn't even sure if it would affect me. I was 49 years old, going through a difficult time and attributed my anxiety, irritability, rollercoaster of emotions, decreased libido, low mood and poor sleep to that.

I went to see my GP, who explained that I would still go through the menopause, because despite my hysterectomy, my ovaries were intact. Following some blood test, my doctor said that I wasn't even pre-menopausal and prescribed me some meds for anxiety. 10 months later, after no significant improvement, I returned to my GP and had further blood tests. Not only was I menopausal, but my hormones had swung so quickly and significantly, that my thyroid gland had become underactive and I was started on thyroid meds, which I am now likely to be on for life. These helped me a lot, my sleep improved and therefore my mood and energy, but unfortunately, the sweats didn't go away.

I continued like this for a few years, until it became so awful that I went back to my GP. My GP said his wife (who was also the senior nurse practitioner at the surgery), was also going through the same and suggested I make an appointment with her, which I did. The nurse was so very understanding and suggested I try HRT. I had read and heard a lot of negativity about HRT and that it increased your chances of cancer. She explained to me that it can increase the risk of breast cancer for women with a family history of the hereditary disease. As this did not apply to me, I felt a bit more reassured. She also told me that she was on HRT and if it hadn't been for that, she doesn't think her marriage would have survived! As you can imagine, I thought 'well if it is good enough for her, then it's good enough for me'. Since starting HRT, I have never looked back!

I am now 54 years old, have been on HRT almost 3 years and am beginning to wonder if it is time to come off them. I am scared of 'rocking the boat' and going back to how I was. I know that the sensible thing for me to do, would be to discuss it with my GP or the nurse. That will be the next chapter in my life. Wish me luck!

MENOPAUSE FOCUS



The Menopause is a natural stage of life; during this time menstrual cycles will stop, and oestrogen levels will decline.

51

The average age of the onset of menopause.

40

However, 1 in 100 will experience it before the age of 40.

What to do if you're suffering symptoms of the menopause:

Visit your GP or head to [NHS.co.uk/conditions/menopause](https://www.nhs.co.uk/conditions/menopause) for more guidance on how to manage your symptoms.

COMMON SYMPTOMS

74%

experience hot
flushes

69%

experience weight
gain

62%

experience night
sweats

54%

experience mood
changes

10%

leave work due to the
severity of their
symptoms

**THERE ARE OVER
50 SYMPTOMS OF
THE MENOPAUSE.
EVERYONE
EXPERIENCES THE
MENOPAUSE
DIFFERENTLY.**



What to do if someone you know is suffering symptoms of the menopause:

- Don't make fun of or mock the menopause or their symptoms
- Do your research - the menopause is a classified health condition
- Acknowledge their symptoms and feelings as they are real and viable
- Support them - be someone they can talk to or confide in

**SPEAK TO US
ABOUT HOW
WE CAN
SUPPORT YOU
IN WORK.**

**MENOPAUSE
FRIENDLY
ORGANISATION**



STRUGGLING WITH THE MENOPAUSE?

The Menopause is a natural stage of any woman's life. Share your experiences and support others who are going through the menopause.

JOIN A SUPPORT GROUP

- Talk openly and honestly about your symptoms
- Discuss the effects upon your personal and professional life
- Share your story in a non-judgemental environment
- Share tips for wellbeing and managing symptoms
- Unload, unwind and destress amongst others who have been there or are going through the same as you.

84% of women say their symptoms interfere with their lives

Please find the details of your next support group meeting below.

DATE:

TIME:

LOCATION:

FOR MORE INFORMATION SEE:

Affix your company logo here

About Advocacy Focus

We help people live the lives they want to live.

We are a registered charity providing advocacy support across the North-West. We support people with complex health and social care needs take back control of their lives, by helping them communicate their needs and wishes when important decisions are being made about their care or treatment. We support people with mental ill health, Dementia, communication difficulties, cognitive impairments, children in care and more. As Advocates, we protect and champion peoples' rights and as a result we are always looking for ways to support and enable more people. With mental ill health and wellbeing at the heart of our agenda; ensuring everyone is healthy and happy is our ultimate goal. This is reflected in our community projects, where we work with isolated and lonely people and constantly work to challenge workplace stigma and discrimination when it comes to mental ill health and female health issues.

**Ask us about our Menopause
Workplace Training -
Call us on 0300 323 0965
or email
training@advocacyfocus.org.uk**

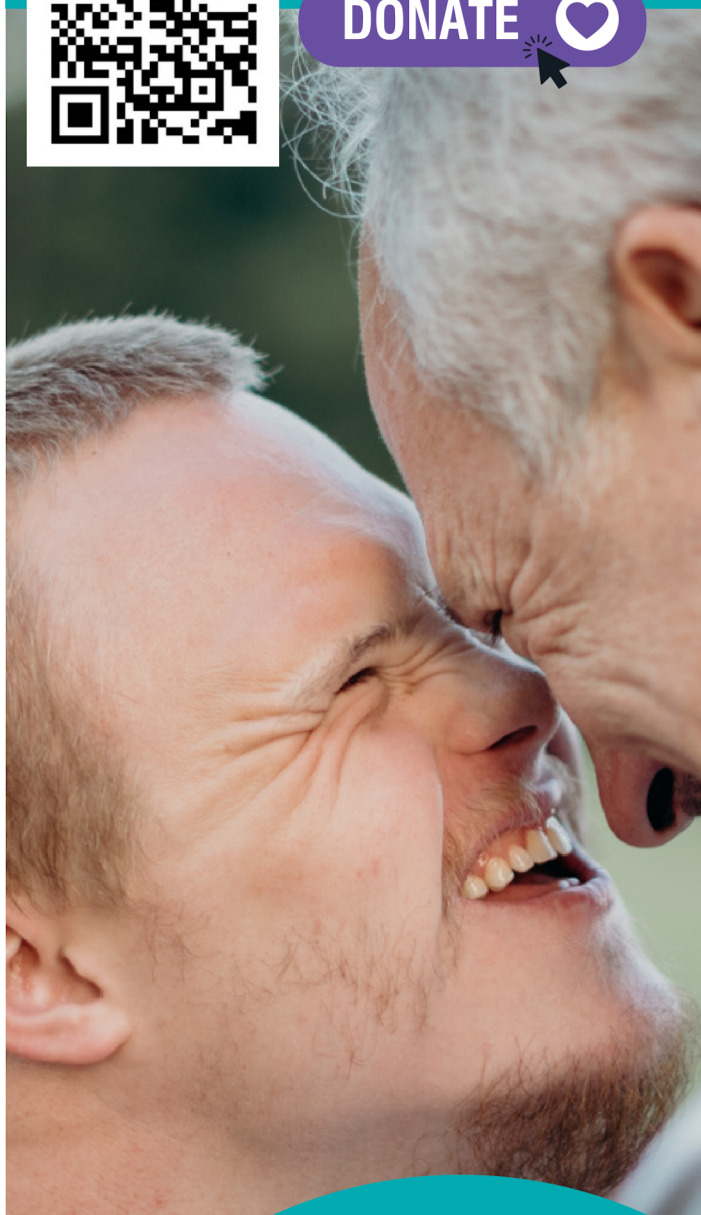
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focus

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Volume 2 will focus
on Menopause in the
Workplace. What
both employers and
employees can do to
help and support,
and useful toolkits
you can use.

