

A photograph of a woman with long, wavy, reddish-brown hair, smiling warmly while looking at a laptop. She is wearing a grey V-neck t-shirt. The background is a blurred cafe or office setting with tables and chairs. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

# Supporting employees through the menopause: Five things all managers need to know

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We know that menopause is a completely natural part of ageing, and yet women experiencing menopause continue to face stigma and shame.

The experiences of menopausal women have long been pushed aside and overlooked. As a result, very few organisations have offered the women in their workplace support during this important time of transition in life.

Study upon study has shown the catastrophic impact of this oversight on individuals and businesses: women in the UK take the most time off during the menopause than any other country in the world; [three out of five women](#) say the menopause has a negative impact on them at work; [one in 10 women](#) have left a job during menopause; and it's been predicted that [one million women in the UK](#) could be forced out of jobs because their employers failed to support them.



## Government rejects bill to introduce menopause as a protected characteristic

In July 2022 a number of recommendations were made in a report by the Women and Equalities Committee to address the lack of support and protection for menopausal women, one of which was to amend the Equality Act 2010 to introduce a new protected characteristic of menopause.

Although the government recently rejected the bill - perhaps missing an opportunity to protect a huge number of talented and experienced women from dropping out of the workforce - this was not a green light for organisations to sweep menopause under the rug.

Needless to say, normalising conversations around menopause, creating safe spaces and tuning into the basic needs of an individual can be transformative for both the employee and the business in which they work.



## Managers play an important role in the experience of menopausal women

Women experiencing the menopause may have symptoms that last months or years - these symptoms can greatly impact an individual's personal life and work. In fact, [one in four people with menopause symptoms](#) say they are worried about the ability to cope with life. Despite women of [average menopausal age being the fastest-growing in the workforce](#), women rarely cite the workplace as a source of support.

Managers have a big impact on an individual's experience in the workplace. [New research](#) has found that almost 70% of people feel their manager has more of an impact on their mental health than their therapist or doctor. Arguably, this research is cause for managers to re-evaluate and ensure they are supporting the diverse range of needs amongst their employees - and that includes the needs of menopausal women.

A study has shown that nearly 20% of those who'd experienced menopause in the workplace said that it had a [negative impact](#) on their manager's perceptions of their competence at work. Plus, [only 50% of women who took time off work](#) to deal with symptoms told their line-manager the real reason for their absence.



## Five important things to know about menopause

Here are five things all managers will benefit from knowing about menopause, including how it shows up and the impact this period of life can have on employees:

### 1/ Absenteeism can be common

The hormone imbalance commonly experienced in both perimenopause and menopause can trigger a range of symptoms including disrupted sleep, night sweats, hot flashes, dry skin, incredible tiredness and fatigue, and muscle aches and pain. For many women, stress only intensifies these symptoms and many will need to take time off work.

### 2/ Menopause can trigger avoidance behaviour

Anxiety triggered by the menopause can be a big shock to women, particularly if they have not experienced anxiety before. As a manager, you may find that employees who once exuded confidence are now much more reserved and worried than usual. Avoidance goes hand-in-hand with anxiety because people look to avoid situations that might make them feel more anxious. We sometimes find that anxiety induced by the menopause stops women from going for promotions.

### 3/ Menopausal women can be prone to accidents

Difficulty concentrating and lapses in memory are common symptoms of menopause which can be caused by the direct effects of low oestrogen on brain function. In addition, changes in the perception of depth of vision can occur which can impact the awareness of surroundings. This perfect storm of symptoms can make some women more prone to accidents during the menopause.

### 4/ Mental health and depression can be a symptom of the menopause

One [study](#) has shown that women are two to four times more likely to experience a major depressive episode during menopause than at other times of their lives. Menopause and low oestrogen can also exacerbate an existing mental health condition.

## 5/ Menopause is a unique experience for everyone

How menopause shows up is different in everyone. A [study](#) that followed over 2,000 women showed that each woman's experience of menopause was different. One woman may experience a wide spectrum of symptoms, whilst another woman may experience mild, or a couple of symptoms. The support each woman needs can therefore vary drastically.

## Support for menopausal women is essential

Menopause is not just a 'women's issue', it is an issue that impacts everyone. Given how much influence managers have over their employees' experience in the workplace, it's essential they understand the impact menopause can have on those affected.

It's key to foster a safe and positive workplace culture that genuinely supports women and encourages them to talk about their experiences. Doing so will enable women to stay and thrive in the workplace.

