



UCU NORTHERN REGION OCTOBER 2021

World Menopause Month

October is World Menopause Month, a time to work together to raise awareness of female health, the impact on women and combatting the stigma and misinformation that's out there. As trade unionists we are concerned about how women, who are going through this natural stage in their life, are supported at work.

The menopause is a natural part of a woman's life that usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 and in the UK the average age for a woman to reach the menopause is 51 years. However, it is not uncommon for some women to experience the menopause before the age of 40.

The perimenopause is the period of hormonal change leading up to the menopause when women may start to experience symptoms. The perimenopause can last up to 5 years, although it can be longer and for some women it may just last a few months. Menopausal women will experience various symptoms that can have a significant impact on them

at work. The causes for many of the symptoms will stem from changes in hormonal levels. It is important to note that not all menopausal women will experience these symptoms as no two women are the same. Some of the common symptoms of the menopause include period changes, hot flushes, night sweats, low mood, anxiety, sleep problems, brain fog/poor concentration, skin changes, urinary changes, low energy. These symptoms can also be experienced in the perimenopause, but may not be recognised as being related to menopause.



For working age women, managing these symptoms in the workplace

requires employers to be empathetic whilst offering practical support. Without the right support, menopausal women in the workplace can experience embarrassment and discomfort, especially during periods of extreme hot flushes and sweats, heightened anxiety or having to be absent from work altogether due to the symptoms experienced.

Employers can do much to raise awareness of the impact of menopause and in doing so can create a working environment in which women can feel able to discuss any issues they have. It will be important that all managers are trained and understand how the menopause can affect work and what reasonable adjustments may be necessary to support women.

Employers may also be able to offer opportunities for women to discuss issues with others and we are aware of employers who have instigated self-help groups and 'menopause cafes'.

Employers should ensure that their Occupational Health advisors can provide assistance to women. Sickness absence procedures should be flexible enough to meet the needs of menopause related sickness absence. Women should also experience no detriment if they require time off during this time. Employers should conduct risk assessment to consider the specific needs of menopausal women and ensure the working environment will not make their symptoms worse.



As a branch committee you can support members and help challenge workplace discrimination including that linked to the menopause. You can help raise awareness eg through branch meetings, workplace campaigns, setting up a workplace support group, carrying out member surveys. The branch has a key role in persuading the employer to do something and supporting members in asking for reasonable adjustments.

Everyone is different but there are a number of things that employers might want to think about as either Health and Safety measures or reasonable adjustments:

- Temperature and Ventilation including the ability to adjust temperature and humidity controls
- Easy access to toilet facilities. This might include considerations about limiting travelling to other campuses, especially if they are at some distance
- Access to cold drinking water
- Allowing time off to attend medical appointments during working hours
- Flexible working. There are a number of ways that people can work flexibly eg changing start and finish times, undertaking work from home where possible etc. This can assist women who are experiencing extreme tiredness, but flexible working may also assist with reducing anxiety (eg not having to face rush hour traffic or crowded public transport).
- Encouraging women to discuss their concerns and providing information about how they can be supported. The Employer can ensure that women have options about who they talk to (eg they may feel uncomfortable talking to a younger, male line manager) Employers will

also need to take into account the cultural/religious make up of women in the workplace.

- Consider setting up support groups or opportunities to talk to women with similar experiences eg Menopause cafes, Menopause awareness days.
- Providing awareness training for all staff.
- Take part in the Red box scheme and extend free emergency sanitary products to staff.
- Undertake a survey of staff to gauge how women would want to be supported

If you are experiencing perimenopause or menopause symptoms which are affecting you at work and you want some support do talk to your local union reps or contact your regional office. All contacts can be found here <https://www.ucu.org.uk/contacts>

Based on UCU guidance on supporting menopausal women which can be found here <https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/9973/Supporting-menopausal-women-at-work---briefing/pdf/Supporting-menopausal-women-at-work.pdf>

We would recommend watching the TUC webinar <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mNGk4FYoao>

The TUC also has some great guidance here <https://www.tuc.org.uk/menopause-work>