

MENOPAUSE POLICY

Approved 7 December 2021



DOCUMENT CONTROL

Policy

Title:	Menopause Policy
Owner:	Human Resources

History

Version	Revision Date	Summary of Changes	Future Review Date
1		New Policy	December 2026

Committee Approval

Version	Committee	Committee Date
1	Council Executive	7 December 2021

MENOPAUSE POLICY

(Covering all employees)

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 West Lothian Council is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for all its' employees.
- 1.2 The council recognises that employees experiencing menopause, whether before, during or after this time of hormonal change and associated symptoms, may need additional consideration, support and adjustments.
- 1.3 The council is committed to developing a workplace culture that supports employees experiencing menopause in order for them to feel confident to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for reasonable adjustments at work.
- 1.4 This policy will demonstrate the council's commitment to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of all the workforce, and will ensure the workplace does not make the menopausal symptoms of employees worse.

2. POLICY AIMS

- 2.1 Through application of this policy, the council aims to:
 - enable employees experiencing menopause to continue to be effective in their jobs;
 - improve manager awareness of how menopause can affect employees, and help managers understand how they can support those experiencing menopausal symptoms at work;
 - foster an environment in which employees can openly and comfortably start conversations, or engage in discussions about menopause in a respectful and supportive manner;
 - raise wider awareness and understanding among all employees about menopause;
 - outline the support available to employees experiencing menopause; and
 - promote the council as an employer of choice and improve retention of employees experiencing menopause.

3. DEFINITION OF MENOPAUSE

- 3.1 Menopause is normally a natural transition stage, although for some it will be medically induced. It is marked by changes in hormones and no longer having periods. A more detailed definition and explanation of common terms that relate to menopause is contained in the glossary at Appendix 1.
- 3.2 Employees experiencing menopause and peri-menopause may have a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms and may often encounter difficulties at work as a result of their symptoms. While some may not experience any difficulties, each person will be affected in different ways and to different degrees over different periods of time, and menopausal symptoms can often indirectly affect their partners, families and colleagues as well.

- 3.3 The council recognises that as well as affecting women, menopausal symptoms can also affect transgender people and non-binary people. Some trans men may experience natural menopausal symptoms. Some trans women may experience pseudo-menopausal symptoms related to their hormone therapy treatment. Some non-binary people may experience menopausal symptoms.
- 3.4 For many reasons, individual experiences of menopause may differ greatly. Some studies suggest that black people may have more prevalent and severe symptoms. Disabled people and those with pre-existing health conditions, may find that menopause can aggravate their existing impairments and health conditions or even trigger new ones. Menopausal symptoms can in turn also be made worse by the disabled person's impairment or health condition.
- 3.5 Menopausal symptoms may include:
- Hot flushes – a very common symptom that can start in the face, neck or chest, before spreading upwards and downward, may include sweating, the skin becoming red and patchy, and a quicker or stronger heart rate.
 - Heavy and painful periods and clots, leaving those affected exhausted, as well as practically needing to change sanitary wear more frequently. Some affected may become anaemic.
 - Night sweats, restless leg syndrome and sleep disturbance.
 - Low mood, irritability, increased anxiety, panic attacks, fatigue, poor concentration, loss of confidence and memory problems.
 - Urinary problems - more frequent urinary incontinence and urinary tract infections such as cystitis. It is common to have an urgent need to pass urine or a need to pass it more often than normal.
 - Irritated skin – including dry and itchy skin or formication, and dry eyes. Also, vaginal symptoms of dryness, itching and discomfort.
 - Joint and muscle aches and stiffness.
 - Weight gain.
 - Headaches and migraines.
 - Menopausal hair loss.
 - Osteoporosis - the strength and density of bones are affected by the loss of oestrogen, increasing the risk of the bone-thinning disease osteoporosis.
 - Side effects from hormone replacement therapy (HRT), a form of treatment for menopausal symptoms for some people (although not suitable or appropriate for all).
 - Exacerbation of existing impairments and conditions that those affected may already be struggling to cope with.

4. SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES EXPERIENCING MENOPAUSE

- 4.1 The council recognises that some employees experiencing menopause may find that related symptoms may impact on their health and wellbeing and will provide all reasonably practicable support to maximise employee wellbeing.
- 4.2 It is also recognised that the menopause is a very personal experience and therefore different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed. Employees experiencing the menopause are encouraged to let their line manager or Human Resources know if they are struggling with symptoms that may impact on their work, so that appropriate support can be provided. Such information will be treated in the strictest confidence and only shared as necessary, and as agreed with the employee,

in order to provide the appropriate support. Where appropriate, referral to Occupational Health will be arranged.

Menopause and Sickness Absence

- 4.3 Sickness Absence related to menopause will be handled sensitively in line with the [Supporting Attendance Policy](#) while trying to prevent action under the policy by improving or removing factors that may make it more difficult to manage symptoms of menopause while at work.
- 4.4 Where appropriate, management discretion will be applied reasonably and proportionately and based on the merits of each case.
- 4.5 Occupational Health referral may be useful if identifying reasonable adjustments that may support an employee to maintain their attendance at work.

Menopause and Supporting Performance

- 4.6 The council recognises the potential impact of menopausal symptoms on performance at work. Where it is identified that an employee's under performance is related to symptoms of menopause, it should be dealt with informally in the first instance and as a capability rather than conduct matter in line with the [Supporting Performance Framework](#).
- 4.7 The manager should work with the employee to identify what support could be put in place to assist them to improve their performance and ensure that such reasonable support is put in place in a timely manner.

Menopause and the Work Environment

- 4.8 The council aims to ensure that the work environment will not make an employee's menopausal symptoms worse. A risk assessment may be useful in identifying any potential adjustments that may be required to the work environment and should include an assessment of :
 - Workplace temperature or ventilation, allowing individual control over environmental factors where possible.
 - Access to adequate toilet and washing facilities and access to suitable cold drinking water;
 - Where appropriate, suitability of uniforms and flexibility over uniform and dress codes should they exacerbate symptoms and availability of spare uniforms;
 - Availability of somewhere suitable for the individual to rest.

Flexible Working and Reasonable Adjustments

- 4.9 The council's approach to flexible working may support an employee to manage the symptoms of menopause while at work. On request, managers should consider whether adjustments can be made to an employee's working arrangements in accordance with the Right to Request Flexible Working

- 4.10 In addition, consideration should be given to whether any adjustment to the employee's duties would support them to manage symptoms of menopause while at work.
- 4.11 Line managers should work with employees and Human Resources to determine the right support for each individual.

Employee Assistance Programme

- 4.12 Confidential support is available for individual employees through the [Employee Assistance Programme](#). In addition to practical information and advice this may include counselling where appropriate.

Bullying and Harassment

- 4.13 Employees should report any instances of bullying, harassment, victimisation or discrimination experienced because of issues related to menopause in line with the [Policy and Procedure on Dealing with Complaints of Bullying and Harassment at Work](#).

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

Manager Responsibilities

- 5.1 Managers (with the support of Human Resources where requested) should encourage employees to discuss the impact of their menopausal symptoms on their work-life and encourage them to access the support and adjustments offered. They should promote a positive attitude to discussions around employee health issues. Managers should be ready and willing to have open discussions about menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treat the discussion sensitively, confidentially and professionally.
- 5.2 Managers will consider all requests for support and adjustments sympathetically and will not discriminate against those employees who are experiencing menopause, and put in place the required support or adjustments in a timely manner. Managers will support employees in informing their colleagues about the situation if appropriate.

Employee Responsibilities

- 5.3 All staff have a personal responsibility to look after their health, safety and wellbeing at work and that of others. Employees are encouraged to inform their manager if they are struggling with menopausal symptoms and need any support, so that they can continue to be effective in their jobs. Employees experiencing menopause are encouraged to seek support through their GP, the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) and other external organisations as detailed in Appendix 2.
- 5.4 All staff have a responsibility to contribute to a respectful and productive working environment, be willing to help and support their colleagues, and understand any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.

MENOPAUSE POLICY

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Menopause – normally a natural transition stage lasting from four to eight years, although for some it can be much longer. Most experience the menopause between the ages of 45 and 55. It is marked by changes in hormones and no longer having periods. A wide range of physical and psychological symptoms may also be experienced as a result of menopause.

Premature menopause – for some, menopause can be experienced at a much younger age, in their 30s or even younger. This is sometimes called premature ovarian insufficiency.

Medical or surgical menopause – there are some medical circumstances that will create an immediate menopause, whatever the person's age, such as a medically induced menopause to shrink fibroids or when the ovaries are damaged by specific interventions such as treatment for cancer, or when ovaries are removed as part of a hysterectomy.

Perimenopause – a period of time before the menopause, in the years leading up to the menopause where there can be significant changes, including irregular and heavy menstrual bleeding and many of the classic symptoms associated with menopause.

Post-menopause – a term used when periods have stopped for 12 consecutive months. However other menopausal symptoms may not have ended so soon. Problematic symptoms may continue for years.

Trans men – individuals who identify as male but were assigned female at birth.

Trans women – individuals who identify as female but were assigned male at birth.

Non-binary – people who do not think of themselves as simply male or female. They may define themselves as both, neither or something entirely different. Their gender identity is more complicated.

MENOPAUSE POLICY

SELF MANAGEMENT & FURTHER INFORMATION

Self Management

Employees experiencing menopause are encouraged not to suffer in silence. Employees are encouraged to consider:

- Seeking medical advice from your GP
- Discussing symptoms with your line manager and requesting appropriate workplace adjustments
- Discussing symptoms with Occupational Health
- Contacting the employee assistance programme.

Employees are also encouraged to make healthier lifestyle choices to help with some of the symptoms such as:

- Eating healthily and regularly – research has shown that a balanced diet can help in alleviating some symptoms, in keeping bones healthy and in not gaining weight.
- Drinking plenty of water.
- Exercising regularly - to reduce hot flushes, improve sleep, boost mood and maintain aerobic fitness levels.
- Not smoking – to help reduce hot flushes and the risk of developing serious conditions such as cancer, heart disease and stroke.
- Ensuring alcohol intake is within recommended levels and cutting down on caffeine and spicy food – all of which can trigger hot flushes.
- Having access to natural light.
- Staying cool at night – wearing loose clothes in a cool and well-ventilated room to help with hot flushes and night sweats.
- Ensuring adequate rest and relaxation – to reduce stress levels and improve mood (through, for example, activities such as mindfulness, yoga and tai chi)
- Trying vaginal lubricant or moisturiser – available from shops and pharmacies for anyone experiencing vaginal dryness.

Further Information

The websites below contain further information and support:

NHS at www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause or www.nhs.uk/conditions/early-menopause

National Institute for Health & Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines on 'Menopause: diagnosis and treatment' at: www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/About-this-information

Menopause Matters at www.menopausematters.co.uk

Women's Health Concern at www.womens-health-concern.org

Daisy Network at www.daisynetwork.org

The Menopause Exchange at www.menopause-exchange.co.uk