

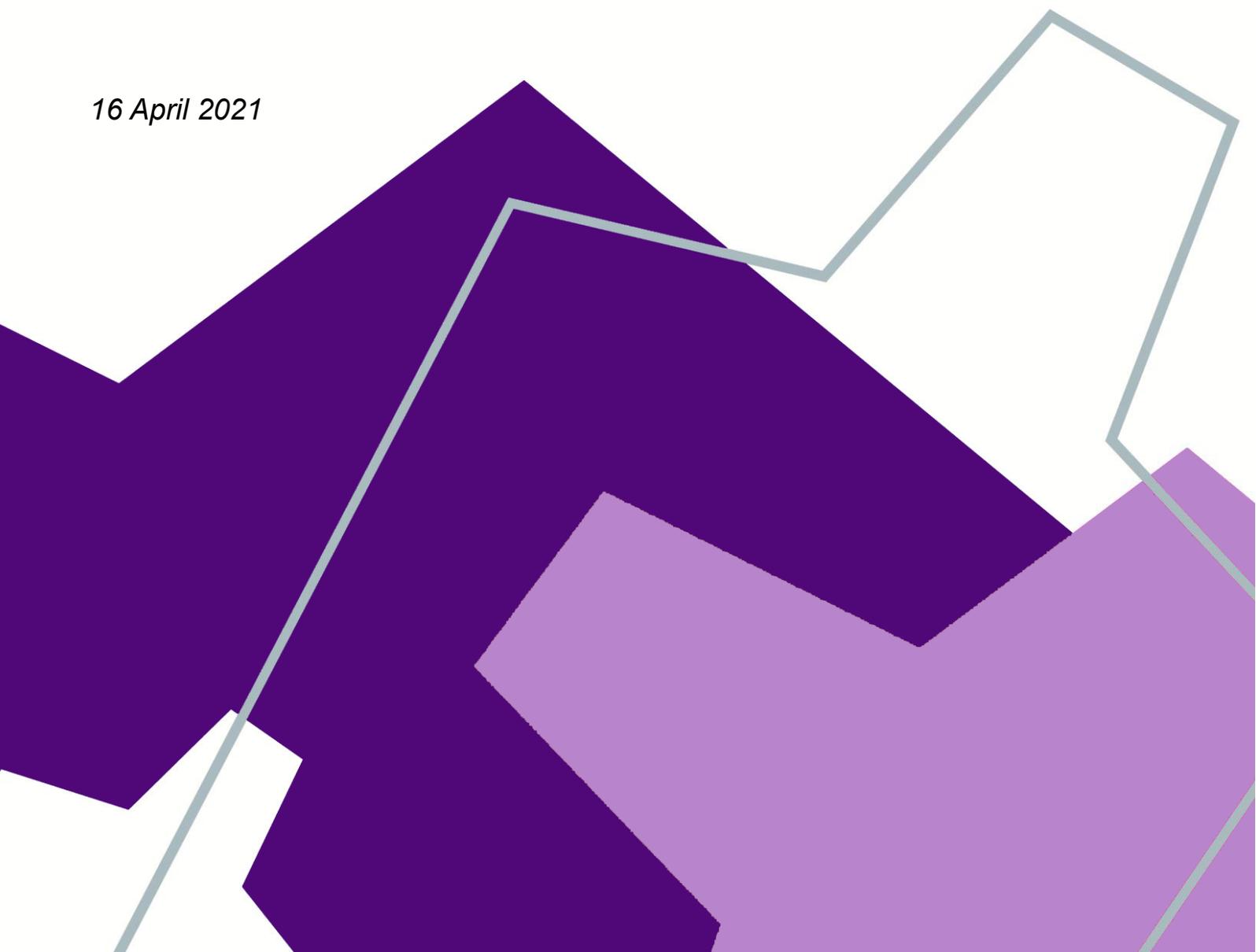


The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Period and Menopause Guidance

Stiùireadh Fala-mìos is Stad na Fala-mìos

16 April 2021



What does this guidance include?

This guidance is to help managers and staff:

- understand the symptoms of the menstrual cycle and the menopause; and
- have effective conversations about possible practical adjustments.

It lists the possible symptoms that those having problematic periods and/or going through the menopause may experience. It includes suggestions for managers about meeting needs and making workplace adjustments.

Circumstances will differ but, for some people, being at work can help them cope with their symptoms. That said, a significant number of people experience problems at work because of their symptoms or may have chronic conditions relating that cause heavy and painful periods such as Endometriosis.

Those who have periods and/or experience the menopause often develop coping strategies that involve hiding or masking or managing their symptoms, so others are not aware they are having difficulties.

It's important that anyone experiencing these issues feels able to discuss them with their manager. By having regular conversations, managers can provide the right support.

Because of the differences in people's experiences, working patterns and environments, a 'one size fits all' approach in the workplace will not be effective.

Responsibilities

All members of **staff** are responsible for:

- Familiarising themselves with the policy and guidance
- Contributing to a respectful and productive work environment and being willing to help and support colleagues. This includes any adjustments colleagues are receiving because of their period or menopausal symptoms
- Taking personal responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and raising any concerns with their manager (if you feel unable to speak to your manager, you can get advice from the People and Culture Office) and
- Being open and honest when having conversations with managers/People and Culture/ Occupational Health.

All **managers** are responsible for:

- Familiarising themselves with the policy and guidance
- Providing opportunities for staff to raise any issues relating to their wellbeing. This includes being willing to have open discussions about periods and the menopause, acknowledging the personal nature of conversations and treating them professionally and confidentially
- Agreeing with the individual how best they can be supported and being prepared to make reasonable adjustments to take account of any symptoms they are experiencing
- Discussing a referral to Occupational Health for more advice and support. And implementing any recommendations where reasonably practical
- Discussing what, if any, information should be shared with colleagues, how this will be done, by who and in a way that respects the individual's privacy but that allows colleagues to understand and
- Dealing with any inappropriate conduct towards someone because of their symptoms.

What the menopause is

The medical definition of menopause is when someone stops having periods and is no longer able to get pregnant naturally. Menopausal symptoms occur when natural oestrogen levels fall. There are various stages to the menopause.

The first phase is known as perimenopause or menopause transition. This can begin several years before the menopause and is the phase where the ovaries stop producing eggs and periods can be altered and/or absent due to a reduction in oestrogen hormone. This phase can start at the age of 30 but is more likely to occur in the 40's. During this phase many may experience symptoms the same as those that occur during the menopause.

Next is the menopause which is when periods stop. This can begin between the ages of 45 and 55. Some people will experience it at a younger age and some symptoms may be experienced over varying lengths of time.

Early menopause happens when periods stop before the age of 45. It can happen naturally or as a side effect of some treatments, such as chemotherapy. Many other conditions or medications can impact the start of the menopause.

Post-menopause is the time after the menopause transition has ended. Symptoms usually disappear, but low hormone levels can prolong symptoms and pose other health risks.

It's estimated in the UK that by 2020, 1 in 3 workers will be over 50. The same trend is anticipated for Parliament, where 1 in 3 staff will be over 50.

Symptoms and support — menopause

Symptoms can include:

- hot flushes
- night sweats
- headaches
- anxiety
- irregular heavy/light periods
- difficulty sleeping
- poor concentration
- panic attacks
- irritability
- mood swings

Not everyone will notice every symptom, or even need help or support. However, 75% of people experience some symptoms and 25% could be classed as severe.

There can also be an impact on cognitive functions, for example:

- not remembering things
- Loss of confidence
- inability to readily find the right word to express thoughts aloud
- having thoughts completely disappear mid-sentence

These are symptoms that people might not recognise as a physical issue. All of them can lead to lower productivity and reduced job satisfaction.

Self-management and relevant support from managers and colleagues are likely to help staff manage their symptoms. It may also be important for staff to seek medical advice from their GP.

Management support — menopause

There are some specific aspects of work that can make symptoms worse, such as:

- inadequate ventilation
- high temperatures
- humidity and dryness
- stress related to workloads
- deadlines and pressures
- lack of drinking water or quiet rest areas
- not being able to take regular breaks

Some practical physical steps can be taken, in discussion with your manager, to make working life more flexible and can include:

- Providing options for individual control of the temperature in the work area, such as by providing a fan, moving near a window or away from a heat source
- Having easy access to drinking water
- Having ready access to washroom facilities where sanitary products are available
- Working flexible hours and/or working at home or adjusting working pattern/practice if there are times of the day when concentration is better or worse
- Reviewing task allocation and workload
- Discussing and providing any memory-assisting equipment. There are many apps available through Office 365. Managers can advise on [IT upskilling](#)
- Having access to a quiet area (the Room for Contemplation is an area available for staff to use for quiet contemplation, meditation, reflection and prayer)
- Taking breaks where needed for time-out from others
- Trying mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk (remember, [staff have access to the onsite gym](#) in M1.22)
- Allowing uniforms to be adapted or offering additional clothing items (for staff who are required to wear uniform)
- Ensuring storage space is available for a change of clothing
- Identifying a 'buddy' for the colleague to talk to, outside of the work area
- Identifying a 'time-out place' to be able to go to 'clear their head'
- Taking time off during the working day to attend medical appointments, if required
- Signposting the individual to the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) (EAP) provider, and other [health and wellbeing-related services](#) that are available to SPCB staff.

For those who work on a rostered shift pattern, every effort will be made to:

- rearrange rostered positions
- enable staff to take regular breaks to manage their symptoms

Where adjustments affect other colleagues in a shared work space (for example, when implementing any of the practical steps, or making changes to someone's role) staff need to feel comfortable explaining to colleagues why the changes are necessary. This is why it's important to have a supportive organisational culture around menopause transition.

These websites may be helpful for those who are (or think they may be) menopausal. And for managers and colleagues who want to know more about the symptoms:

<https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>

<https://community.livebetterwith.com/menopause>

It may also be helpful to discuss a referral to Occupational Health to get more advice about the impact of the symptoms being experienced. And for guidance on any potential adjustments to the person's role. This can be arranged through the People and Culture Office. Again, it's also important for staff to seek medical advice from their GP.

What periods are

A period is the part of the menstrual cycle where bleeding occurs. This can last anytime between 3 and 8 days. This usually happens once a month from puberty until the menopause, except during pregnancy.

Changes in body hormone levels before a monthly period can cause physical and emotional changes.

There are also chronic and debilitating conditions such as Endometriosis that can cause painful or heavy periods.

Symptoms and support — periods

Not everyone will experience every symptom, or even need help or support. But most people will experience some symptoms. PMS (premenstrual syndrome) is the name for the symptoms experienced in the weeks before a period.

These can include:

- abdominal or pelvic cramping
- lower back pain
- bloating and sore breasts
- food cravings
- mood swings and irritability
- headache and fatigue

If you have a health problem, such as depression, irritable bowel syndrome, migraine or asthma, symptoms might get worse before a period starts.

Some practical physical steps can be taken within the workplace. They're similar to those outlined for the menopause. But it's important to recognise that circumstances, and so conversations, will be different.

Management support — periods

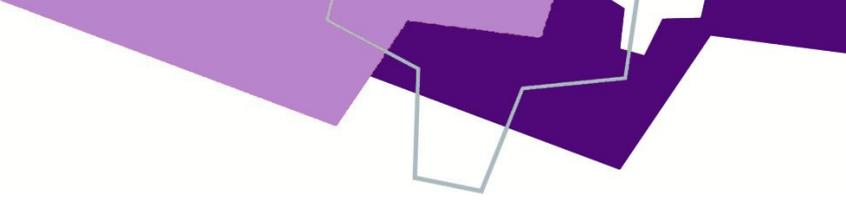
In discussion with managers, these adjustments can be considered to make working life more flexible for those dealing with periods at work:

- allowing time for regular toilet breaks
- reviewing task allocation and workload
- working flexible hours and/or at home
- taking days off if required or leaving early, perhaps to resume working later in the day or evening

The following websites may be helpful for those who have issues with their periods. And for managers and colleagues who want to know more about symptoms:

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/menstrual-cycle>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/periods/>



Endometriosis

The Parliament has signed up to the Endometriosis Friendly Employer scheme to demonstrate its commitment to support the wellbeing of staff with Endometriosis. There are 1 in 10 women of reproductive age in the UK who experience the effects from Endometriosis which can be debilitating and sometimes serious with heavy and painful periods. The aim of the scheme is to help raise awareness to improve the support for those with this chronic, long terms condition. The scheme will ensure that all staff and managers are comfortable talking about practical adjustments to manage symptoms at work.

More information about the condition can be found on [Endometriosis UK's website](#).

Employee Assistance Programme

We recognise that if someone's experiencing symptoms associated with the menopause or periods (or if someone they know is) they may need additional support.

Support is available through the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) (EAP) provider or, if they're a member, they can talk to their Trade Union representative.

A template for confidential conversations

This template may be helpful for managers who need to record conversations and agree any actions and adjustments. A member of staff may want to:

- speak about their symptoms
- talk about how they are feeling
- speak about another colleague or family member

For managers, it's important to:

- Familiarise yourself with the Policy and Guidance
- Allow enough time to have the conversation and in an appropriate place
- Encourage staff to speak openly and honestly
- Suggest ways in which they can be supported (see Manager Support/Symptoms, above)
- Agree actions and how to implement them
- Agree if other members of the team should be told and by whom
- Allow time for a follow-up meeting if needed

Summary of Discussion:

Agreed Actions/Adjustments:

Reviewing Adjustments (for the member of staff and manager to discuss whether the adjustments are working):

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For further information contact:

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