



HUMBERSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

# People & Development

## Menopause and Menstrual Health Policy

<b>Owner</b>	<b>Executive Director of People and Development</b>
<b>Responsible Person</b>	<b>Head of Occupational Health &amp; Wellbeing</b>
<b>Date written</b>	<b>November 2019</b>
<b>Date of last review</b>	<b>November 2024</b>
<b>Date of next review</b>	<b>November 2026</b>
<b>EIA Completed</b>	<b>August 2022</b>



What we must  
do well



How we support our  
communities



We value and support  
the people we employ



We efficiently manage  
the Service

## CONTENTS

1. [Introduction](#)
  - [Core Code of Ethics](#)
  - [National Guidance](#)
2. [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion](#)
3. [Aim and Objectives](#)
4. [Associated Documents](#)
  - [Equality Impact Assessment](#)
  - [Legal References](#)
  - [National Guidance](#)
5. [Health and Safety](#)
6. [The Menopause](#)
7. [Symptoms and Work Related Issues](#)
  - [Menstrual Symptoms](#)
8. [Supporting Women at Humberside Fire & Rescue Service](#)
9. [Work Adjustments](#)
10. [Guidance for Managers and Employees](#)
11. [Further Sources of Information](#)

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This policy has been designed to assist employees and managers in understanding the ways in which colleagues should be supported during the menopause and/or menstruation.

Humberside Fire and Rescue Service (HFRS) are committed to creating an open and supportive culture. We want you to feel comfortable speaking about how the menopause and/or your periods may be affecting you at work and enable you to ask for the support that you need to help you manage your symptoms.

Statistics and supporting information in this guidance have been taken from research done by The University of Nottingham (2010), ACAS-Menopause at work, The British Occupational Health Research Foundation (BOHFR 2019), TUC-Supporting working women through the menopause, Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM)- Guidance on Menopause and the Workplace, The Journal of musculoskeletal and neuronal interactions and Menopausefriendly.co.uk.

### **Core Code of Ethics**

HFRS has adopted the Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services. The Service is committed to the ethical principles of the Code and strives to apply them in all we do, therefore, those principles are reflected in this Policy.

### **National Guidance**

Any National Guidance which has been adopted by HFRS, will be reflected in this Policy.

## **2. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

HFRS has a legal responsibility under the Equality Act 2010, and a commitment, to ensure it does not discriminate either directly or indirectly in any of its functions and services or in its treatment of employees, in relation to race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, age, pregnancy and maternity, religion and belief, gender reassignment or marriage and civil partnership. It also has a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled applicants, employees and service users.

## **3. AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

This policy sets out the expectations, parameters and consideration for all employees, dealing with the welfare of operational and non-operational employees experiencing symptoms of the menopause and/or menstruation.

All employees should be aware of this policy and all managers and supervisors with responsibility for employees should be aware of the arrangements that should be put in place within the Service that will ensure employees experience no disadvantage because they may need occupational adjustments.

## **4. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS**

- [Equality Impact Analysis](#)
- Legal References
  - Health and Safety Management Regulations
- National Guidance

There is no specific national guidance relating to this policy.
- [Flexible Working Policy](#)
- [Standards of Dress Policy](#)
- [Absence Management Policy](#)
- [Data Protection Policy](#)
- FOM - Guidance on Menopause and the Workplace and
- The Journal of musculoskeletal & neuronal interactions.
- TUC - Supporting working women through the menopause
- ACAS - Menopause at work
- Research from The British Occupational Health Research Foundation (BOHFR 2019)
- Research from The University of Nottingham (2010)
- Maltais, Desroches, & Dionne (2009)

## **5. HEALTH AND SAFETY**

HFRS has a responsibility to ensure the health, safety and welfare of our employees and we are required to carry out risk assessments under the Health and Safety Management Regulations, which should include any special risks for employees experiencing the menopause and/or menstrual symptoms.

The Service recognises its moral and legal duty to consider the physical and psychological needs of the workforce.

## **6. THE MENOPAUSE**

Menopause is defined as a biological stage in a woman's life that occurs when her hormones change and eventually menstruation stops. Usually, it is defined as having occurred when they have not had a period for 12 consecutive months (for those reaching menopause naturally). An individual's experiences before and during menopause are recognised as personal; as a result of this, the menopause is an issue that is not commonly talked about.

As women make up 47% of the UK workforce, with approximately 3.5 million aged over 50, there is a need to understand the occupational health issues they may face at work because of the menopause. Employers, managers and colleagues need to recognise and provide the support that may be required.

The menopause usually happens between the ages of 45 and 55 years of age with the average age of onset in the UK being 51. However, several factors can lead to

women experiencing premature or early menopause under the age of 45. Around 1 in 100 women experience premature menopause.

Factors that can lead to premature menopause include:

- Surgery to remove the ovaries.
- Radiotherapy to the pelvic area as a treatment for cancer.
- Some chemotherapy drugs for cancer may lead to early menopause.
- A hysterectomy before the menopause can lead to the ovaries stopping oestrogen production at an earlier age.
- A family history of early menopause.
- In some women with early menopause no reason can be determined.
- IVF Treatment can also bring on early menopause.

The time leading up to the menopause is known as the perimenopause stage and this is when the changes that are associated with the menopause may occur. Women can begin to experience symptoms as hormone levels fluctuate. Some have almost no symptoms but around 80% do experience noticeable changes, and of these, 45% find their symptoms difficult to deal with.

Post menopause is the time after the menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months and for the rest of her life.

When this policy refers to the menopause, it is referring to any of the above stages.

## **SYMPTOMS AND WORK RELATED ISSUES**

Everyone is different, some may not experience any symptoms at all, however, three in four women may experience physical and/or psychological symptoms and as many as one in four may experience serious symptoms. These symptoms are associated with a decrease in the body's production of hormones. The resulting low and changing levels of hormones, particularly oestrogen, are thought to be the cause of the perimenopausal symptoms in many women.

The most common symptoms that affect working women include:

- Hot flushes during the day or night.
- Difficulty sleeping, insomnia or fatigue, irregular and/or heavy periods.
- Aches and pains.
- Migraines or headaches.
- Urinary problems, e.g. increased frequency.
- Low mood, depression or changes in mood.
- Poor concentration and memory.
- Nervousness, worry or anxiety.

## **Occupational Health & Wellbeing Menopause and Menstrual Health Policy**

Overall, this period of hormonal change and associated symptoms can last from four to eight years and for a small amount of women it can be longer. Not every woman will experience all these symptoms, and they may not occur continuously.

Without appropriate support and consideration, these symptoms can adversely affect the quality of both personal and working life. At work they can cause embarrassment, diminish confidence and can be stressful to deal with. The menopause may be compounded by the development of other health conditions.

In 2011, the British Occupational Health Research Foundation (BOHRF) published research from the University of Nottingham. This study showed:

- Many women found they are little prepared for the arrival of the menopause, and even less equipped to manage its symptoms at work. Over half had not disclosed their symptoms to their manager.
- The majority of women responding, felt they needed further advice and support.
- Workplaces and working practices are not designed with menopausal women in mind.
- Heavy and painful periods, hot flushes, mood disturbance, fatigue and poor concentration pose significant and embarrassing problems for some women, leaving them feeling less confident.
- Women are not comfortable disclosing their difficulties to their managers, particularly if those managers are younger than them or are male.
- When women had taken time off work to deal with their symptoms, only half of them disclosed the real reason for absence to their line managers.
- Some women said they worked extremely hard to overcome their perceived shortcomings.
- Others considered working part-time, although they were concerned about the impact on their career if they did so and/or had even thought about leaving the labour force altogether.
- Over half of the sample reported they were not able to negotiate flexible working hours or working practices as much as they needed to in order to deal with their symptoms.
- Over half of the women felt that it would be useful to have information or advice regarding the menopause and how to cope with work from their employer.
- Temperature in the workplace appeared to be an issue for many women. Nearly half of the sample reported not having temperature control in their usual working environment. Some could not open windows or experienced interpersonal difficulties doing so in shared workspaces.

### **Menstrual Symptoms**

We recognise that menstrual symptoms can affect people differently. Some people may experience little or no symptoms and for others, menstrual symptoms may affect their daily lives.

While menstrual symptoms vary between different people and different cycles, some of the most common symptoms experienced in the weeks before or during a period include:

- Mood swings
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Tiredness
- Insomnia
- Stomach cramping; and headaches

## **7. SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES AT HFRS**

Employees may prefer to develop their own coping strategies such as:

- Obtaining fans or opening windows.
- Adjusting their working hours or routine in line with the flexible working policy.
- Wearing layers of clothing and having a change of clothes at work.
- Altering diet.
- Doing more exercise.
- Seeking out information about the menopause and/or menstruation.
- Using HRT or alternative remedies to help cope with the more troublesome symptoms at work.

However, the following approaches will be taken by HFRS as a responsible employer to support women and lessen the impact of this issue:

- Publishing and promoting this guide for line managers will assist in understanding the potential impacts of menopause and menstruation and the simple adjustments that can be made.
- By raising awareness with all employees through workshops, employees can support colleagues (if required) and know menopause and menstruation is not something to be embarrassed about.
- In creating a positive attitude towards the menopause and menstruation by developing a culture of openness, the aim is to increase knowledge for all employees as their colleagues, partners, spouses or family members could be affected by menopausal or menstrual symptoms.
- Information will be available on how to get support for any issues that arise as a result of the menopause or menstruation.
- Identifying women's groups that other women can talk to and receive

support from.

## **8. WORK ADJUSTMENTS**

While women in all occupations and roles may suffer varying symptoms, it is recognised that women who work shift patterns, work in hot environments, have little say over uniform or PPE and who deal with trauma and stress due to the nature of their role, may need specific support at work.

Management risk assessments should consider the special needs of menopausal women and ensure the working environment will not make symptoms worse. In the case of firefighters it is likely to include being able to cool down quickly after wearing fire kit or post-incident.

A number of areas that were indicated as being key considerations for women were better access to:

- Cold drinking water.
- Toilet facilities (welfare unit on the incident ground).
- Comfortable rest room.
- Adjustable workplace temperature and ventilation.
- Access to fans.
- Comfortable chairs.
- Shower facilities.
- Consideration of the most suitable materials to be used for uniform that allow better body temperature regulation. Refer to the [Standards of Dress Policy](#) for further information on 100% cotton polo shirts.
- Advice about the importance of maintaining aerobic fitness levels and taking weight bearing exercise throughout their working lives, where appropriate.

### **Guidance for Managers/Employers**

One of the key outcomes of the BOHRF research was for organisations to make sure that their female employees feel empowered to speak openly about their health-related problems and ask for help.

Menopause can affect strength and performance; however this does not have to be the case. Research on changes in muscle mass and strength after menopause suggest resistance training and adequate protein intake can help reduce the risk of sarcopenia and the loss of muscle (Maltais, Desroches, & Dionne (2009)).

It is important, therefore, that women work on maintaining physical strength and preserving muscle mass. Employees can self-refer to the fitness advisor for advice and support on maintaining fitness.

Employers and managers have a responsibility to ensure the health, safety and



## **Occupational Health & Wellbeing Menopause and Menstrual Health Policy**

welfare of their employees. Therefore, risk assessments should take account of any special risks for women going through the menopause.

Women should be able to expect support and practical assistance during what is, for some, a difficult time. Regular, informal conversations between manager and the employees may enable discussion of any change in health, including issues relating to the menopause. Such conversations can identify any support needed at work and so help women to be safe and well in carrying out their work duties. It can also encourage women to seek further support from GPs or other health practitioners.

However, employers need to recognise that some women may be reluctant to have discussions about their experience of the menopause with their manager and signposting to Occupational Health & Wellbeing (OH&W), Human Resources (HR) an FBU female representative or Voices for Women members can be useful.

Employees should be able to expect respectful behaviours at work including those that relate to their gender and/or age.

Information and sign posting to other agencies that can offer support will be made available via the intranet and other means (e.g. OH&W campaigns).

### **Guidance for Employees**

Women who find their menopausal and menstrual symptoms are affecting their wellbeing and capacity to work should:

- Find out more about further support from available sources of information (see hyperlinks at the end of this guidance).
- See a GP for advice on available treatment options.
- Discuss practical needs with their line manager or another manager they feel comfortable talking to.
- Use technology where this is helpful, e.g. for reminders or note taking.
- Speak to an OH&W professional to discuss support and possible work adjustments.
- Talk about symptoms with colleagues, particularly those who are also experiencing symptoms. Work out preferred coping strategies and working patterns. If those they work with are supportive, this can make a big difference.
- Avoid hot flush triggers (such as hot food and drink) especially before presentations or meetings.
- Consider relaxation techniques such as mindfulness techniques and other potentially helpfully techniques such as cognitive behaviour therapy, as these can help reduce the impact of symptoms.
- Consider lifestyle changes such as weight reduction, smoking cessation and exercise.

Further guidance for women that could help support them during their menopause include:

## Occupational Health & Wellbeing Menopause and Menstrual Health Policy

- Consider asking for changes to garments worn under PPE, e.g. moisture and temperature management tee-shirts if necessary. Refer to the [Standards of Dress Policy](#) for further information on 100% cotton polo shirts.
- Consider making requests to adjust the workplace temperature and ventilation – and explain why so colleagues understand.
- Request workplace adjustments where appropriate.
- Use the [Flexible Working Policy](#) to help manage severe health conditions arising from the menopause (note: flexible working requests are not guaranteed).

### Quiet place to work

If you need time out to relax, a short break to manage any symptoms or take medication, or a quiet space to work, you should speak to your line manager who will try their best to accommodate this by utilising the breaks which are on offer to employees.

### Menstruation products

We aim to ensure that welfare products are available in toilets and shower facilities throughout the organisation. If you feel there are products missing, please highlight this to your manager who will be able to request a delivery through Stores.

### Sickness

There is no expectation for you to work if you are unwell because of symptoms related to your menstrual cycle.

Unless otherwise set out in your contract, if you are sick and unable to work, you should follow the procedure set out in our [Absence Management Policy](#).

You do not have to disclose that your absence is related to menstruation if you wish to keep this private. However, we want you to feel that you can be open about the reason for your leave and record this appropriately.

### Occupational Health & Wellbeing

In some cases, a referral to OH&W may be recommended so that they can advise on how your symptoms are impacted at work and make recommendations on the types of adjustments that may be appropriate. OH&W may also signpost you to external sources of help and advice.

### Employee assistance programme

Help and support is also available through our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). You can use our EAP to speak to an independent adviser on a confidential basis about any issue that is troubling you. To access the EAP website, go to <https://www.well-online.co.uk/> and enter **Username:** hfrslogin, **Password:** wellbeing.

### Data protection

We will process any personal data collected in accordance with our [Data Protection Policy](#). Data collected from the point at which we become aware of the issue is held securely and accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purposes of providing the necessary support.

## **9. FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

[ACAS Menopause at work](#)

[British Menopause Society](#)

[FBU Good Practice Guidance for Menopause](#)

[Maltais, Mathieu & Desroches, J & Dionne, Isabelle. \(2009\)](#). Changes in muscle mass and strength after menopause. Journal of musculoskeletal & neuronal interactions. 9. 186-97.

[Menopause-NHS](#)

[Managing short-term menopause symptoms NICE Pathways](#)

[Menopause Diagnosis and Management NICE](#)

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/About-this-information>

[Supporting Working Women- TUC](#)

[The Menopause Support Guide to Understanding Menopause for Men.](#)

**For further guidance/information relating to this document, please  
contact Occupational Health & Wellbeing**