

Menopause and the workplace: Guidelines for employers



Guidelines for employers

While menopause is a near-universal experience for women (and transgender and non-binary people, too), it can often feel very isolating. Many are reluctant to let anyone know that they're experiencing it, especially in the workplace, and therefore fail to access the best available support.

Instead, they find their own solutions where they can, even if that falls short of what's needed. Self-employed respondents were able to shift their working hours, rest when needed or simply step outside for some fresh air. Other women had less flexibility.

Sought-after support can come in the form of empathy and openness, or it can be physical assistance such as cool drinking water, fans, and provision of a rest area. Three-quarters of respondents told us they would have liked information or advice from their employer about available support, or access to a network at work (such as an advice line or women's group) to aid them through this challenging period.



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This week the company introduced menstrual and menopausal leave – six days per year.

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Our workplace is very focused on general wellbeing so there is leave available if you are unwell and there are things to support wellbeing which would help – but nothing specific to menopause.

What's next?

If your workplace isn't set up to support women during the menopausal transition, you risk losing experienced and highly competent employees.

Not just this survey by Circle In, but others that have examined the topic of menopause in the workplace⁹, draw the same conclusion: a culture of empathy and understanding could make the world of difference to people experiencing menopause in the workplace.

If your organization genuinely wants to drive change, the results speak for themselves. This is your chance to act. In the following pages, we share some key areas in which employers can improve outcomes for those going through menopause.

01 Develop a framework for flexibility

Every person experiences menopause differently. Some may not need to make any changes to their duties. Others may benefit from flexible or changed hours, or a temporary shift in their role (for example, reducing client-facing work while they experience frequent hot flashes).

Your employee has the best insight into their own experience and also knows their own role the best. Your role is to provide a framework of flexibility within which they can make the adjustments they need.

Consider what your framework looks like, for example how it fits into your diversity and inclusion strategy, or how formal you wish to make it.

One of the avenues to consider is introducing policies for absence and flexible working options. It is important that these take into account menopause as a potentially long-term and fluctuating experience.

86%

of respondents wished they had better access to flexible working options as a way of supporting them through menopause.

The Victorian Women's Trust has developed a [menstrual and menopause workplace policy template](#) for use by employers.

The template is freely available and ready to be integrated into your workplace. It is designed to be flexible for adaptation to your particular workplace and the needs of your employee. It offers, where practicable:

1. The option to work from home;
2. The option to provide a rest area or other alternatives so the employee can stay at the workplace; and
3. Up to 12 paid leave days per year where the experience of menstruation and/or menopause mean the employee can't perform work duties.

02 Raise awareness in your workplace

Menopause is rarely talked about, either in the workforce or in the media. As a result, women going through menopause need support, and this is an opportunity for workplaces to raise awareness.

There are various ways you can do this, including:

1. Hold an event and invite women to connect and help normalize the conversation. This is also an opportunity to educate employees and leaders on the experience of menopause and the support required.
2. Share real stories. Our work at Circle In has shown that role modeling and sharing experiences are an incredibly powerful way to drive cultural change. So why not ask a few women to share their stories with the wider team?
3. Find a senior leader to be a support champion. Change requires influence, so identify someone who will be in a position to drive awareness, policy and support services with key stakeholders.

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03 Equip and inform your managers and leaders

The role of a manager is to normalize the subject of menopause and encourage transparency in staff. However as the research has shown, there is a lack of both awareness and information on the topic. With only 3% of respondents feeling that they had received 'excellent' support from their workplace during menopause, equipping, upskilling and supporting managers is absolutely essential.

There are a few ways you can do this:

1. Develop a short manager conversation guide that outlines things such as: understanding menopause, the impact on working life, how to provide the right support, guided questions and key considerations.
2. Implement manager training. This could be as simple as raising awareness, right through to formal training.
3. Invite managers to join employee groups. If you have an Employee Resource Group (ERG) or online community to support women experiencing menopause, invite a selection of managers or leaders to join. This will provide a forum to increase awareness of the impacts of menopause, and help managers understand how they can provide the right support.

At Circle In, we understand that managers have a key role to play, which is why our platform now includes both a manager conversation guide and training.

04 Build a community

We know that most people experiencing menopause would like to receive information or advice from their employer about available support, or access to a support network at work.

If any employee support services exist, consider directing your employee to these. Better still, set up an ERG or online community for employees to connect with each other. This could be using Slack, Yammer, Teams or whatever tools or platforms your organization prefers for networking.

It should be noted that not everyone who has experienced menopause will necessarily be supportive, well-informed, or positive. The success of connecting employees around their menopause experience will partly depend on the overall workplace culture, and will depend on the care taken in setting up the platforms and opportunities for connection.

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of respondents wished they had better access to flexible working options as a way of supporting them through menopause.

1. Start a social channel. Pick a platform that is easy to use, readily available and start sharing. Create a space that is welcoming, safe and encourages authentic conversations about menopause in the workplace. (We love #hotwomen – see the case study on the next page.)
2. Form a menopause Employee Resource Group. Starting an ERG is an important step towards building an inclusive workplace that ensures employees experiencing menopause feel safe, supported and are encouraged to bring their best selves to work. When employees choose to engage in causes they care about and are empowered to own the decision-making process, they become great advocates for the company as well as the groups or initiatives they are supporting.

8 out of 10 people that know someone experiencing menopause say they don't know how to support them during this time.

Case Study: Creating a channel for discussion

"I think one of the things that's really stopped real inclusion when it comes to menopause, is a lack of information and a lack of data. Some of the information we know anecdotally because people have shared their experiences with us, but there's no real understanding about how menopause affects people in the workplace, how it affects their careers and the impact that that has."

At Herbert Smith Freehills, we've connected with our people on menopause in a couple of ways, and they're really employee-led initiatives. The first one is a great group on our internal social networking site called Hot Women, which I just love. That's been an awesome space that a group of people experiencing menopause just started, and they share tips and experiences and different things. It really shows the power of community and the power of being able to connect with other people going through the same experiences as you.

We've also done a couple of events, trying to raise awareness around menopause and the impact that it has on people. We all know that this is a real taboo to talk about at work - and yet it affects a huge proportion of our population. As employers, we're starting to try to lift that taboo. It impacts on people's careers, people's wellbeing, and it should be treated just like any other career or wellbeing issue."

Madeleine Motion,
Diversity & Inclusion Manager, Asia Pacific
Herbert Smith Freehills

43%

of women with experience of menopause would have liked better ventilation, air conditioning, and temperature control.

28%

of respondents who hadn't gone through menopause were not aware that some aspects of office working can make it physically difficult for women experiencing menopause to work there.

05 Make adjustments to the physical working environment

The nature of office work can make it particularly difficult for women experiencing menopause to physically work there. Which means practical and easy changes to the office environment can often improve working conditions dramatically.

Some of the ways employers can improve the physical environment include:

- Better ventilation, air conditioning and temperature control.
- Access to additional cooling such as desk fans.
- Natural light.
- Access to cool drinking water.
- Provision of a quiet or restful area.
- If a specific uniform is required, clothing made from breathable materials.

Time to act

At Circle In, we help organizations show they care. In conducting this research, we have uncovered a huge cohort of the working population that deserves more of that care.

From the fundamentals of making a working day physically bearable, to enabling a culture that accommodates honest conversations, there is still work to be done.

There are many parallels to be drawn between the impact of pregnancy and menopause, yet there is a chasm in how the two are accommodated by employers. When it comes to supporting female colleagues or employees, it's vital to think beyond pregnancy to the whole of reproductive health. ⁹

What can you do today to provide meaningful support? How can your organization become a better place to work during menopause? We hope this resource offers some inspiration, and is your starting point to drive that change.

For more resources on how you can support your employees, visit www.circlein.com, drop us an email at hello@circlein.com, or get in touch with us [here](#).

About Circle In

Circle In is a unique family benefits platform designed to build trust, support and connection with employees, and guide them on their journeys through life as parents and caregivers. Circle In works with leading employers across the globe and has partnered with brands such as Atlassian, GAP Parents, Coca-Cola Amatil, Estee Lauder Companies and Culture Amp, to name a few.

The platform features a custom branded experience, automated manager nudges, manager conversation guides, journey workflows and reporting capability. The offering supports all families on their journey from considering, to pregnancy, to parenthood and back to work again, enabling working parents to navigate the complexities of parenthood, from planning all the way through to teenage years and caring for the elderly.

By preventing employee disengagement and turnover, Circle In provides proven ROI – but more than anything else, it's the right thing to do.

A recent study across all users showed:

85% of employees using Circle In say the support for working parents makes them feel more positive towards their organization.

79% are more inclined to recommend their organization to others as a result of the support for working parents.

88% of employees have had a good to excellent experience using their organization's Circle In platform.

We know that organizations are nothing without their people. And people care. So Circle In helps you care for people who care.

We would love to show you what we do. Visit our website, book a demo, or message us at hello@circlein.com if you want to know more.

Talk to us