



Health



The small business guide to menopause

When you own a small business, your team can often feel like family. They dedicate so much time and energy to your business, so it's natural that you want them to feel supported both in the workplace and at home. There can be a number of things that your employees are going through that you may not be aware of that are affecting all aspects of their wellbeing, and one of these is the menopause. If you have not had experience of the menopause yourself, directly or indirectly through family members or friends, you may not realise how big of an impact it can have on all aspects of a person's life, from sleep to concentration.

Whilst many employers now offer support for women going through the menopause, there is still a lot of work to be done, with one survey finding that a quarter (24%) of the 2,000 women aged 45 to 67 surveyed saying that they were unhappy in their jobs because of a lack of support, with 63% noting that their place of work had not introduced any kind of policy to make things easier for women going through menopause.¹

Creating a supportive workplace can often be achieved through some simple changes, such as encouraging a culture of open dialogue between line managers and employees. The rewards can be far-reaching and can include improved employee wellbeing, as well as greater employee engagement and loyalty. In our small business guide to menopause, we explore how business owners can support their team and create a menopause-friendly workplace.



What is menopause?

Menopause is a natural part of ageing and occurs when your period stops due to lower hormone levels. Menopause can be experienced at any age due to medical conditions (such as ovarian failure), surgery, certain cancers and their treatments. Perimenopause occurs when symptoms are experienced before periods have stopped, which can occur across a number of years. Menopause is reached when a person who usually has periods has not had a period for 12 months.²

¹[The Guardian, 2022](#)

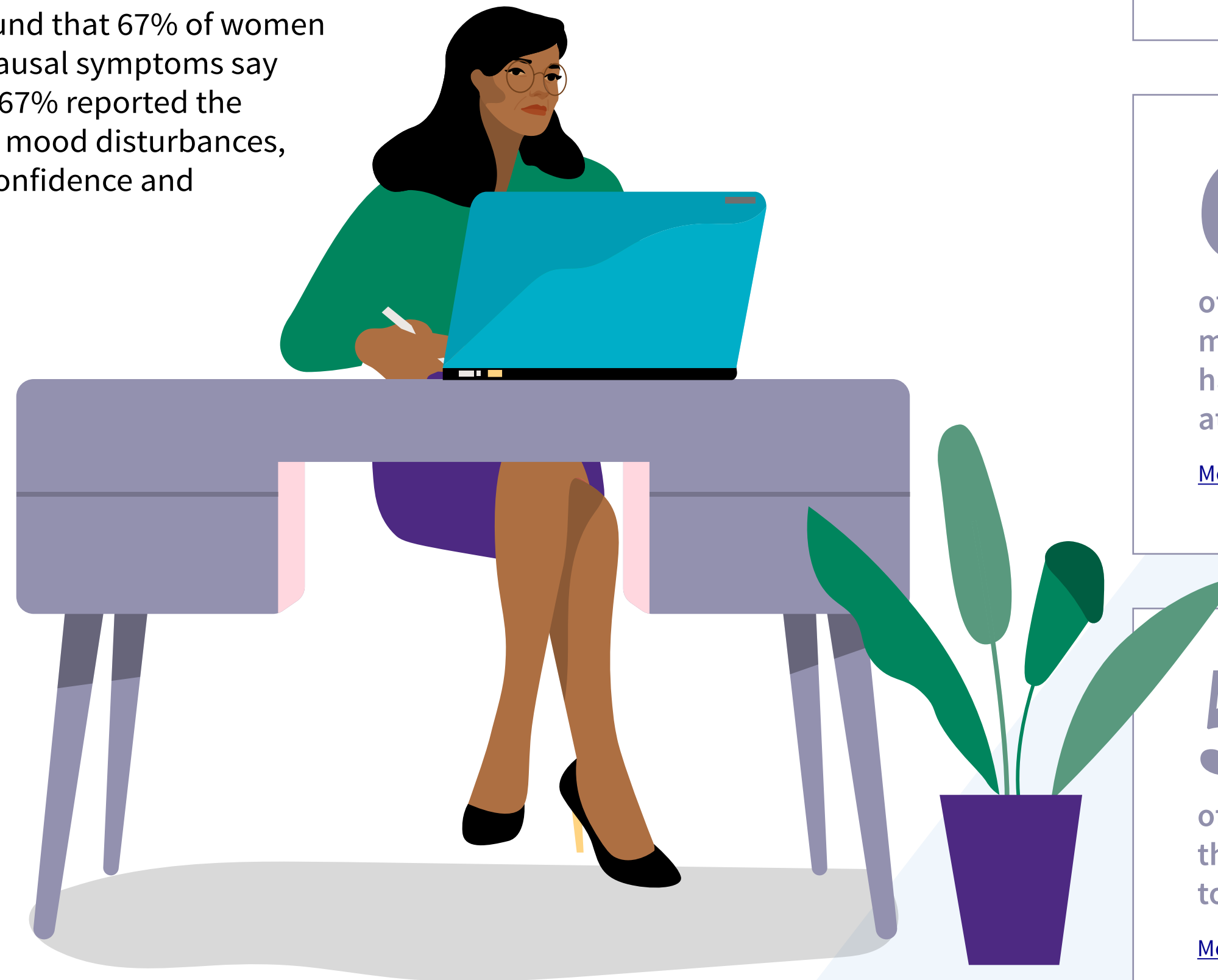
²[NHS](#)

What impact does menopause have in the workplace?

According to the ONS, 66.9% of females aged 50-64 are currently in employment. With menopause usually occurring between the ages of 45 and 55, this shows that there is a high number of menopausal women currently in the workplace.

If you've not had experience of menopause yourself, it can be difficult to fully understand the impact that the symptoms can have on someone's life. This can be particularly prominent in the workplace. One study found that 67% of women (aged 40 to 60 in employment) with experience of menopausal symptoms say they have had a mostly negative effect on them at work.³ 67% reported the most common symptoms as being psychological, such as mood disturbances, anxiety, depression, memory loss, panic attacks, loss of confidence and reduced concentration.³

With such a high proportion of workers experiencing symptoms of menopause and perimenopause, small business owners should have awareness of the symptoms, and how they can support members of their team who may be going through the menopause to ensure they feel supported and understood.



24%

of women are unhappy in their jobs because of a lack of support with menopause

[More than 1m UK women could quit their jobs through lack of menopause support - The Guardian](#)

67%

of women with experience of menopausal symptoms say they have had a mostly negative effect on them at work

[Menopause in the workplace - CIPD](#)

53%

of women could think of a time when they were unable to go into work due to their menopause symptoms

[Menopause in the workplace - CIPD](#)

So what are the symptoms of menopause?

Symptoms of menopause and perimenopause include²:

- Hot flushes
- Anxiety
- Mood swings
- Brain fog (problems with memory or concentration)
- Difficulty sleeping
- Headaches and migraines
- Reduced sex drive.

As with many medical conditions, people will have different experiences with the menopause and will experience different symptoms.

As well as having physical symptoms, menopause and perimenopause can also have a big emotional impact. Reduced hormone levels combined with difficulty sleeping can have a knock-on effect on all aspects of your life.



How can business owners and managers support menopause at work?

Even though it's a natural part of life, menopause is often a very taboo subject in the workplace. This is reflected in a study by the CIPD which found that 30% of those surveyed said they had been unable to go into work because of their menopause symptoms, but only one quarter of that group felt able to tell their line manager the real reason for their absence.⁴

The European Menopause and Andropause Society has put together the following recommendations for how employers and managers can support menopause in the workplace⁵:

- Make health and wellbeing during the menopause a priority for the organisation, ensuring a consistent and positive approach
- Establish and promote a clear business case for ensuring that women with menopausal symptoms which impact on work are not stigmatised or discriminated against and that staff are retained
- Have a zero-tolerance policy to bullying, harassment, victimisation or belittling of women with menopause symptoms
- Undertake an assessment of how work patterns (e.g. night working, shift patterns) may impact symptoms and allow flexible working arrangements, including the home, wherever possible
- Ensure provision of training for managers and supervisors on how to have sensitive conversations at work
- Create an open, inclusive and supportive culture regarding the menopause
- Allow disclosure of menopausal symptoms but do not assume that every woman wants to talk about them
- Allow flexibility of dress codes and uniforms using thermally comfortable fabrics
- Review control over workplace temperature and ventilation (e.g. provision of desk fans) and provide access to cold drinking water
- Ensure access to clean and private changing and washing facilities as well as toilets
- For customer-focussed or public-facing roles, allow breaks to manage symptoms such as severe hot flushes.



⁴[CIPD, 2022](#)

⁵[European Menopause and Andropause Society \(EMAS\)](#)

How to manage menopause symptoms at work

Nikki Porges, Health Care Nurse at AXA Health, shares some tips for how those who are experiencing menopause can manage symptoms in the workplace.



Review your menopause policy

First of all it can be worth looking at the menopause policy at your workplace which should outline what support is available. This can include things such as flexible working, remote working if your job allows for this, as well as the right to have a desk fan at your workplace, and an understanding that you may need to take more regular toilet breaks with supplies of tampons and sanitary towels in each toilet.



Ask your manager for support

If you feel your concentration is suffering or you are not able to perform your job as well as you usually do due to any of the symptoms you may be experiencing, you might like to think about scheduling a meeting in with your line manager to discuss this or, someone from your HR department. You can then make them aware of the issues you are facing and look to see what adjustments can be made to allow for this while you are going through the menopause and it's impact on you. Most workplaces now have training for both managers and HR teams to ensure you receive the sensitive support you may need during this time.



Wear layers

On a practical level it can also be helpful to ensure you are wearing layers that allow you to be cool if you are experiencing hot flushes, but have something with you to keep you warm afterwards. Facial cooling mists are also a great help especially when combined with a fan during a hot flush, whether you are at home or work.



Make use of planners

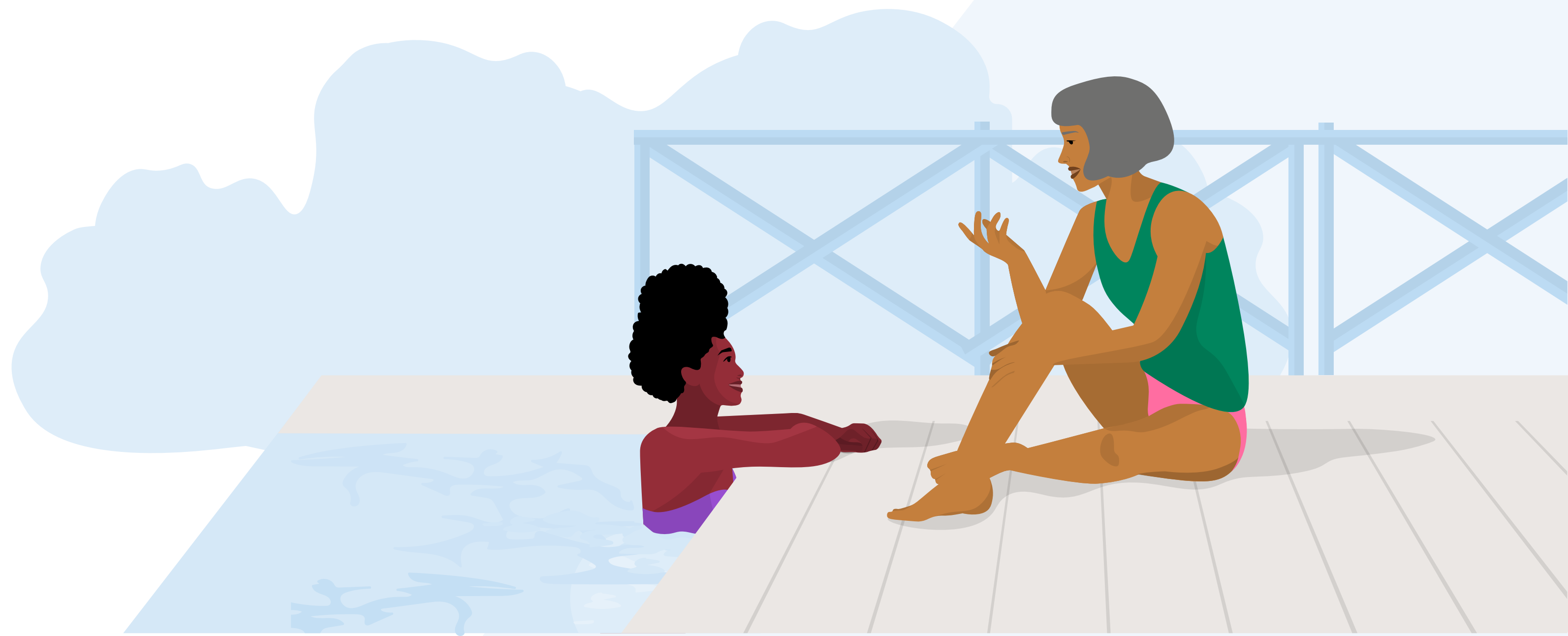
If concentration and focus are issues (brain fog) then employing the use of a sectioned planner and or notebooks can help you to stay organised during your day by arranging your work into essentials for the day, priority work and reminders etc.

How to manage menopause symptoms at home

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Lifestyle changes during the peri menopause and menopause can go a long way to helping you while you go through the menopause transition as well as future proofing your health for the years to come which is essential whether you decide to or are taking HRT or not. Nikki Porges shares some simple lifestyle changes to help manage the symptoms of menopause:

- **Try to minimise stress.** Stress can be the number one driver behind severity and intensity of hot flushes, for example, and can also worsen mood changes, concentration, brain fog and anxiety. Some simple things to try that are proven to be effective include CBT (cognitive behaviour therapy), which is a counselling technique that research has found can help reduce the frequency and intensity of hot flushes as well as helping with your general sense of wellbeing and coping techniques during this period in your life. Meditation, yoga and getting out into nature, even if its only for ten minutes a day, are also known to help so try to build in some relaxation therapies during your week as this can also help to improve sleep and restfulness.
- **Optimise your sleep environment.** If sleeping is disturbed due to night sweats it can be helpful to have a fan by your bed alongside some cool water, and a cooling facial mist (which can help during the day time too). Try sleeping in and under natural fibres such as cotton or linen (and it can help to have a blanket at the bottom of your bed to pull up when needed after a night sweat has finished).
- **Exercise.** We also know that moderate exercise such as walking, cycling, and swimming, alongside some strength training exercises, can not only help to maintain bone and muscle density as oestrogen levels lower and help with weight management, it can also help to improve mood and energy levels as well. Even 10 - 20 minutes a day of exercise can be beneficial. The key is to find something you enjoy and carve some you time out to do this.



How to manage menopause symptoms at home

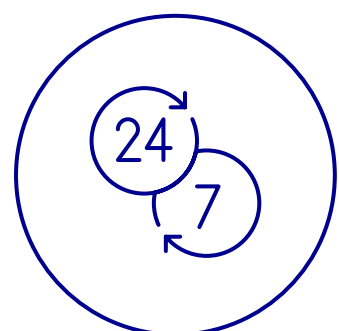
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- **Nutrition.** Nutritionally look at your diet, if possible focus on reducing your intake of saturated fat to support your heart health. No more than 20 grams a day of saturated fat intake is still recommended during the menopause transition. Try to include more healthy fats such as avocados, olive oil, nuts and seeds, and ensure you are getting adequate calcium and vitamin D intake through dairy products (the skimmed and reduced fat varieties are fortified with these for example). Magnesium tends to be lower as we get older and can contribute to sleeplessness during this period in life so focus on foods that contain good levels of magnesium such as whole grains, oat, bran, nuts and seeds, beans and pulses which also help your heart and bowel health too. If you are thinking about adding in a magnesium supplement, magnesium citrate or magnesium glycinate tend to be better absorbed and gentle on the stomach too. Ensure you are having a diet that contains plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables as well as lean proteins.
- **Communicate with your partner.** As the menopause can also play havoc with emotions during this time some women find that not only is their confidence disappearing, but relationships can start to suffer as well. The key here is communication between you and your partner. Let them know what you are going through and the symptoms that this is causing and how it is making you feel. Your partner may like to read up on some of the help guides and books that are available to help them understand what's happening, and ways they can support you. Some couples, for example, have a codeword they use to let their partner know their mood or patience is struggling. As anger can be a feature of the mood changes, a codeword can be your partners tip to allow you some grace and not take things too personally. Other things partners can do to help include recognising that any changes they are seeing in you are due to hormones and to focus on their responses to you, taking this into account. Libido can dwindle during this time and it's important if you find this happening to let your partner know not to take it as a rejection but as a physical response to the hormone changes you are having. With the use of the many help guides available your partner can also learn to accept any silences and to also ask what you need as well as encouraging you to speak to a health professional if the menopause is affecting you badly.



How we can help

At AXA Health, we're here for you and your team when you need menopause support. Everyone's personal experience of the menopause is unique to them. Whatever stage your employee is at we're here to help. AXA Health offers specialist menopause support as standard (when an Outpatient option is included with your plan). Some of the ways we can support them include:



If they're looking to understand more about the menopause, our experienced health professionals at the **24/7 health support line** can be their first port of call. Our team of nurses, counsellors, and pharmacists all have experience in supporting women during menopause. They'll be able to give your employee the lowdown on the menopause, what symptoms might manifest and the treatments available. Plus a whole host of tips to help them through it. Nurses and counsellors are available 24/7. Pharmacists are available 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm Saturdays and 8am to 12pm Sundays



If they need more medical support, the next step is to speak to a GP. Our small business health insurance plans give you and your team access to our **online private GP service, AXA Doctor at Hand, 24/7, 365 days a year** so long as appointments are available. AXA Doctor at Hand appointments are with qualified GPs who have menopause training. They'll be able to make a diagnosis and recommend a care plan for managing short and long term symptoms. AXA Doctor at Hand is provided by Doctor Care Anywhere. Appointments are subject to availability



Most women find they can manage with the help of wellbeing support and lifestyle changes, or through the advice of their GP. However, if your employee finds they're really struggling and their GP needs to refer them, our network of **British Menopause Society (BMS) accredited consultant gynaecologists** are on hand to offer the right specialist support. Available when you include an Outpatient option on your plan*

To find out more about our menopause support as part of our small business health insurance, call our small business experts on **0800 389 7413** or get a quote today.

*The routine management of the symptoms of menopause is not covered by our plans. Individual exclusions may apply, regardless of group cover.



AXA Health small business health insurance

If you'd like to find out more about business healthcare cover, including what is and isn't included, please contact:



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