



University of Essex



Holding supportive conversations about the Menopause

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Holding supportive conversations about the Menopause

The University Strategy 2019-28 illustrates our commitment to create and maintain environments that foster a sense of belonging, inclusion, well-being, resilience and empowerment (O3.1). It is imperative that we protect these enabling environments across our three campuses to ensure that employees feel supported to work. For this to be achieved, conversations about wellness must become a routine part of how we work.

Our People Supporting Strategy 2019-28 sets out our objective to develop a new approach to support employees experiencing the menopause (PSS03.4). The menopause is a natural part of life and, for too long, it has been a taboo subject. This has resulted in no acknowledgement or dialogue discussing the impact of symptoms at work and subsequently little support to help manage them.

Our people-centred approach also shapes the way we support members of our university community within the workplace. It ensures equality of treatment through our policies, processes and the value-based decisions we are trusted to make. Specifically in relation to this guidance, we should all have an awareness of the menopause, irrespective of gender identity, age or personal experiences.

As a line manager, you play an important part in supporting and promoting wellness amongst your employees as part of this commitment. Taking time to have non-judgemental conversations to understand if and how symptoms of the menopause are affecting your team members can allow for effective ways of providing support at work to be explored together. Managing this well will enable individuals to feel empowered and supported at work whilst highlighting the fact that conversations about the menopause are not something to be avoided.

Before holding these types of conversations, consider the following:

- **allow adequate time to have a conversation.** It may be best to meet at a time where there are no other commitments scheduled for immediately after the meeting is due to finish. This is to ensure that the end of the conversation is not rushed and both you and your employee feel that you have discussed everything you need to.
- **find an appropriate location.** It is important to hold the conversation in a place that is comfortable for all and in a space where employees feel they can speak freely in a confidential space. A suggestion would be a quiet, separate room with natural light and a source of ventilation.
- **be patient.** The societal stigma that has been placed on menopause has resulted in it seldom being the topic of conversation. As a result, it can take a lot of courage for people to speak about their symptoms and experiences, and this is sometimes accompanied by feelings of awkwardness. These societal barriers are real, and it is important to acknowledge them to ensure that you are creating a safe environment to hold your conversation. At the beginning of your meeting, take time to establish rapport and trust with your employee by explaining that the meeting will be free from judgement and centred around the provision of support.
- **listen to understand.** It is important to actively listen to your employee to understand how they are feeling, rather than solely listening to respond to what they have just said. You can gain more insight into how your employee is feeling by asking open questions and allowing them to expand upon their answers. You should avoid providing advice on what has worked previously for you or others you know, as what works for one person may not work for another.
- **display empathy.** Empathy is the ability to understand the feelings of others. You do not need to have personal experience of the menopause or have experienced the same symptoms as your employee to try to understand how they are feeling, and the impact of their symptoms on their life both inside and outside of work.
- **discuss whether other members of the team should be informed.** Some employees may feel comfortable speaking to others within the team about their feelings and symptoms. Others will not. Establish which is the case with your employee and ensure that their wishes are upheld in the best way possible. Should they provide consent for other members of the team to be informed, discuss whether they would like to tell them or whether they would prefer you to do it on their behalf.
- **explore ways that your employee can be supported and agree on next steps.** Be open minded and creative in the type of support that can be provided. Adjustments can sometimes be simple and implemented quickly without the need for a referral to Occupational Health. Some examples of adjustments can be seen in the accompanying Menopause guidance document. Once adjustments have been made, you should arrange a future meeting to review these changes. If your employee is struggling with their symptoms, encourage them to visit their GP, if they have not already.

Further Support

If you require further information on how to support your employees, please seek advice from the [People and Culture Employee Relations](#) team who will be happy to help. Further information about Occupational Health referrals can be found through the [staff directory](#).

Helpful Menopause resources

- NICE menopause guidance
- Henpicked

University sources of support and information

- [University Counselling Service](#) {Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)}
- [Work-related stress](#)
- [Stress management guidance for line managers](#)
- [Coaching Essentials for line managers](#)
- [Improving assertiveness](#)
- [Recreational and sporting activities](#)
- [Report and support](#)
- [Mental health first aid](#)
- [Zero tolerance of harassment and bullying](#)
- [Building Resilience in periods of change](#)

Related University policies and procedures

- [Health and Safety policy](#)
- [Supporting staff with health conditions and impairments](#)
- [Sickness absence policy and procedure](#)
- [Stress management policy](#)
- [Flexible working](#)
- [Special leave policy](#)
- [Equality and Diversity policy and strategy](#)
- [Zero tolerance policy](#)