

Supporting menopause in the workplace

A guide for understanding Menopause and
supporting colleagues going through Menopause

What is Menopause?

- Menopause is a stage of life experienced by people with female reproductive organs as oestrogen levels decline and periods cease.
- It is best described as a 'transition' rather than a one-off event as menopausal symptoms are typically experienced for several years.
- This biological transition typically occurs between age 45 and 55. However, some people may experience early menopause before this.
- Perimenopause is the phase leading up to menopause, when a hormone balance starts to change. For some people this can start as early as their twenties.
- It's important not to make assumptions about whether or not someone may be going through the menopause. Instead, we need to foster an environment where people are safe to speak up and disclose their symptoms to their manager or colleagues.

What are the symptoms?

People may experience a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms. These may include:

- Hot flushes, sweating and chills
- Insomnia or sleep disturbance
- Irregular periods and/or heavy periods
- Anxiety, depression, panic attacks, and/or loss of confidence
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Mood disturbance and/or irritability
- Memory loss, brain fog and/or difficulty concentrating
- Muscle/joint aches and stiffness
- Skin changes – dryness, itchiness, sensitivity and unusual sensations
- Overactive bladder
- Recurrent urinary tract infections including cystitis
- Heart palpitations

People experiencing the symptoms of menopause require the same level of support and understanding in the workplace as anyone experiencing any ongoing health condition

Ways we can offer support

Headaches and fatigue

Working for short periods of time from a meeting room or quieter area may help

Muscular aches, bone and joint pain

Make sure you are taking breaks away from your work space to walk around and stretch

Complete a Health & Safety self assessment as there may be additional support that would help in your workspace set up.

Hot flushes and/or daytime sweats

Drink plenty of cold water and a small desk fan may help - just email HealthandSafety@tab.co.nz for one.

Sleep disruption and/or night sweats

Chat to your manager about the possibility of a short term change of your work hours, for example a later start and finish time. This won't be possible in all roles but something to consider.

Short-term memory issues and overall wellness

As with any health issue we encourage people to talk with their manager - including possible adjustments to tasks and duties that are proving a challenge for a short period of time.

Work from home for a few days here and there (if possible)

Benestar EAP services are available to everyone. They are available over the phone, in person or online. just head to benestar.com and login with: Company ID: [REDACTED] and password: [REDACTED]

If you are a permanent employee you will have access to funded Southern Cross medical insurance which covers GP and some specialist appointments

You can also access virtual GP visits at no cost

<https://www.southerncross.co.nz/society/for-members/carehq>

What you can do to support people in your life

Enabling our co-workers who are experiencing menopausal symptoms to be their best at work, by communicating openly and providing the right support, enables all people – and all teams – to flourish and perform at their best.

Having awareness about the menopause transition will enable you to support colleagues with menopausal symptoms, giving you an opportunity to improve your relationships with team members and contribute to a positive team morale.

Understanding the practical adjustments and support measures available (previous slide) will be helpful if a colleague reaches out to you for help or guidance.

ONE OF MY TEAMMATES HAS OPENED UP TO ME - WHAT SHOULD I SAY?

Don't feel like you have to have the perfect thing to say. Simply offering your support and understanding can be one of the most helpful things you can do as a colleague.

Ask your team mate, **“Are you OK?”** and **“How would you like me to support you?”**
Let them know that you are there to help them in any way that you can.

Be prepared to listen and give them time to think when you have asked them a question. Don't interrupt with your own thoughts, and practice active listening.

Avoid making assumptions or generalisations – menopause is deeply personal and everyone's experience of this biological transition will be different.

Encourage them to speak with their manager for further support.

Contributing to an inclusive work environment

Simple changes to how you interact with your team mates when they are experiencing menopausal symptoms - **or any health changes or challenges** - can make a world of difference:

- Building relationships based on trust, empathy and respect will make it easier for a colleague to feel comfortable about raising a health issue like the menopause.
- Asking team mates how they are on a regular basis will help to create an open and inclusive culture, and give them the opportunity to raise any concerns.
- Don't make assumptions – everyone is different, so take your lead from the person you are speaking with.
- If you're going through or have experienced menopause personally, the most effective way to contribute to destigmatising it and ensuring an open and safe environment is for you to share your own experience, if you're comfortable with this.

Additional Resources

[Benestar](#) - 0800 360 364

[Health Navigator NZ](#)

[NZ Early Menopause Support Group](#)

Australasian Menopause Society (AMS) information

- [Understanding Symptoms](#)
- [Maintaining Weight and Health during Menopause](#)
- [Understanding HRT](#)
- [Find an AMS doctor in NZ](#)

[Menopause and the workplace](#) (University of Auckland)

[Supporting staff through the menopause: What employers need to know](#) (CIPHR)

[Menstruation, Menopause, and Hormone Replacement Therapy for Women](#) (20 min video)

Te reo Māori resources

[Te ruahinetanga, he aha ngā tohu?](#)

[He aha te haumana taiaki ruahinetanga \(MHT\)? He marutau anō?](#)

Special thanks to AIA NZ and the [Menopause Awareness & Action Community](#) for sharing their toolkits which helped form this guide.