

Ruahinetanga : Menopause at Work

Support Guide for Managers

Fatigue Brain fog
Joint pains Poor concentration
Health Natural process Menstrual cycle
Aches changes Estrogen Problems
Weight gain **Mānukanuka | Anxiety**
Hot flushes Taiaki | Hormones Daytime sweats
Tiredness **Whakatorouka | Sleep disruption**
Ruahinetanga | Menopause
Irritability Muscle stiffness Stress Medication
Acne **Psychological issues**
Panic attacks Palpitations Flexible arrangements
Night sweats Headaches **Perimenopause**
Depression Skin changes sweats
Mood disturbance

Introduction

Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha | The University of Canterbury (UC) is committed to providing an inclusive, supportive and nurturing environment for all staff and recognises the importance for individuals to be healthy and well at work. **Kia tika, kia pono, kia aroha** – doing what is right with integrity and with empathy.

Our values are who we are at UC and inspire us to empower others and to be the best we can in all our interactions with each other: **Whanaungatanga** (we value people and their differences); **Tiakitanga** (we will enhance and nurture our resources); and **Manaakitanga** (we extend care and empower others). Therefore we embrace all aspects of our staffs' life experiences so they can bring their best, authentic self to the UC whānau.

Menopause is a natural process, typically occurring between the ages of 45-55. Symptoms can be both physical and psychological and these symptoms can pose a challenge for some staff as they go about their daily lives, including at work.

It is important that everyone understands what menopause is, what impacts it can have and be able to talk openly about it without stigma or embarrassment – it should not be a taboo subject.

Staff experiencing negative menopausal symptoms require the same support and understanding as those experiencing other challenging health conditions. The Health and Safety at Work Act (2015) also requires the employer to provide a safe work environment, as far as reasonably practicable, which includes making reasonable adjustments to support health issues when needed.

Helping you support staff through the menopause

Every manager should know what the menopause is, when it happens and how it can affect staff. It is likely that you currently manage or will manage in the future, at least one person who is transitioning through the menopause.

How confident do you think a member of your team would feel to talk to you about the menopause?

Menopause need not be an awkward or embarrassing topic. Often a few simple changes to someone's working environment can make a world of difference, enabling someone experiencing menopausal symptoms to continue performing and contributing to their full potential. Even just talking about it openly can reduce the impact of someone's symptoms.

What are the most typical symptoms of the menopause?

The menopause can cause a wide range of symptoms, both physical and psychological that can last for a number of years. However symptoms can fluctuate and be felt to varying degrees, everyone is different.

Common symptoms can include:

- Psychological issues such as mood disturbances, anxiety and /or depression, memory loss, panic attacks, loss of confidence and reduced concentration
- Hot flushes (brief and sudden surges of heat usually felt in the face, neck and chest)
- Fatigue (sleep disturbance can make people feel tired and irritable)
- Night sweats (hot flushes that happen during the night interfering with sleep)
- Irregular periods and /or periods can become light or heavy
- Muscle and joint stiffness, aches and pains
- Recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs) including cystitis
- Headaches
- Weight gain
- Palpitations (heart beats that become more noticeable)
- Skin changes (dryness, acne, general itchiness)

Research indicates some individuals have positive experiences from menopause, which can include increased confidence and a sense of authority; speaking one's mind more often; no longer willing to tolerate inappropriate behaviour in the workplace and less concerned about others' opinions.

What are the different stages?

Peri-menopause

This is the time leading up to menopause when some staff may experience changes such as irregular periods or other menopausal symptoms. This can last for years before menopause.

The Menopause

This is when oestrogen levels decline and periods cease, reaching the end of natural reproductive life. The average age for this is 51, but it can be earlier or later than this due to surgery, an illness causing a medically induced menopause, or for other reasons.

Post-menopause

This starts after menopause has occurred, i.e. after periods have ceased for 12 months. Symptoms associated with menopause can continue on average for up to 4 years, but can go on as many as 12+ years.

What is your role as a Manager?

You have an important role to play in ensuring that anyone experiencing menopausal symptoms receives the same support and understanding as if they had any other illness.

Supporting your staff experiencing menopause transition is crucial. Effective management of team members with menopausal symptoms that are impacting upon their work will help you improve your team's morale, retain valuable skills and talent, and reduce sickness absence.

Simple tips that can make a world of difference:

- Building relationships based on trust, empathy and respect will make it easier for an employee to feel comfortable about raising health issues, including the menopause
- Regular and informal one-to-ones with members of your team can provide the forum for a conversation about any changes to someone's health situation
- Asking people how they are on a regular basis will help to create an open and inclusive culture, and encourage your staff to raise any concerns
- Don't make assumptions, everyone is different, symptoms can fluctuate and be felt to varying degrees so take your lead from the individual
- UC has a [Ruahinetanga : Menopause Guideline](#) in place and it is important for you to understand UC's legal duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act (2015) to make reasonable adjustments to support health issues when needed.

Please don't hesitate to contact your People and Culture Business Partner if you need advice in this area.

How to approach a sensitive conversation

It is important to set the right tone when opening a conversation about any sensitive issue. However, try not to worry too much, being over-sensitive will stop you from addressing the issue.

Review this checklist before approaching a sensitive conversation:

- Avoid interruptions – switch off phones, ensure colleagues can't walk in and interrupt
- Ask simple, open, non-judgmental questions and avoid patronising responses
- Speak calmly
- Maintain good eye contact
- Listen actively and carefully
- Encourage your staff member to talk
- Give your staff member ample opportunity to explain the situation in their own words
- Show empathy and understanding
- Be prepared for some silences and be patient
- Avoid making assumptions or being prescriptive

You may wish to also encourage your staff member to contact one of the Kaihāpai Ruahinetanga | Menopause Supporters for support, their details can be found [here](#).

Confidentiality

If someone tells you about their health condition, including menopausal symptoms, this should be treated as confidential.

If they want information about their condition to be shared, consent must be explicit. You should discuss with them who will be told and by whom, as well as the information they do or don't want shared with colleagues.

How you can provide practical help

The menopause affects people in different ways, but there are some practical steps you can take to support someone experiencing the menopause at work.

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| <p>Sleep disruption and/or night sweats</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise someone may need to take a short-term absence if they've had a difficult night. • Offer a flexible working arrangement, for example either a later start time or an earlier finish time • Allow staff to work from home on an ad hoc basis if they've had sleep disruptions. |
| <p>Hot flushes and/or daytime sweats</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at ways to cool the working environment, for example provide a fan, or move a desk close to a window, if possible, etc. • Limit the time wearing PPE such as face masks if working in labs or with machinery, if practical. |
| <p>Heavy or irregular periods</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge there will be more frequent breaks • Allow staff to leave work at short notice, and temporarily work from home if they have very heavy bleeding. |
| <p>Headaches and fatigue</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider a temporary adjustment to work duties • Provide a quiet area to work where possible • Acknowledge more frequent breaks if required. |
| <p>Muscular aches, and bone and joint pain</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make any necessary temporary adjustments to work • Encourage movement and stretches if that helps • Encourage the staff member to undertake an ergonomic workstation assessment. |
| <p>Psychological issues (for example loss of confidence, poor concentration, anxiety etc.)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support your staff member to discuss concerns with you • Discuss possible adjustments to tasks and duties that are proving a challenge • Refer to EAP (Employee Assistance Programme) or counselling services if appropriate • Allow time out from others when needed, to have some quiet time or to undertake relaxation or mindfulness activities • Remind staff of services available at UC, including courses run by the Psychology Clinic and the professional development workshops such as Growing Personal Resilience • Have agreed protected time in their diary to catch up with work • Encourage staff member to visit their GP for support • Ensure your staff are not disadvantaged if they take leave for their wellbeing. |