



AUTHOR / KEY CONTACT

Menopause and the Workplace



Emma Starmer
Senior Employment Law and HR Advisor

✉ emma.starmer@la-law.com
☎ 01202 786276

World Menopause Day takes place every year on 18 October and can provide a good opportunity to remind your workforce about the support that is available to them.

There have been many articles published highlighting the fact that employment rates for women aged between 50 and 64 have increased from 46.9% in 1992 to 66.3% in 2023. It is not surprising, therefore, that employers are seeking ways to address the impact perimenopause and menopause can have on their employees' well-being and performance at work. Sadly, almost one in four women with serious menopause symptoms are still forced to leave work.

Facilitating an environment that enables everyone to reach their true potential and supports them appropriately when issues arise is important in aiding retention. The Minister for Employment has been quoted as saying, 'we're losing too many talented and experienced women from our workforce far too early – and we know we can and must change it'.

The menopause is a natural period of transition, affecting women and other people who have a menstrual cycle, which the NHS say typically occurs around the age of 51 in the UK. Symptoms vary widely and can be experienced over several years. Whilst some can move through this phase smoothly, for others, daily life can be severely impacted. In some cases, menopause symptoms can be considered a disability.

Employment tribunals are dealing with an increase in menopause-related claims, which shows that there is room for improvement when it comes to supporting employees who are negatively impacted.

Although the menopause is not a specific protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, if an employee or worker is put at a disadvantage and treated less favourably because of their menopause symptoms, this could amount to discrimination if related to a protected characteristic, such as sex, age, disability or gender reassignment. In addition, an employer also has obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. As such, an employer must, where reasonably practical, ensure everyone's health, safety and welfare at work.

Symptoms of menopause can include anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, reduced concentration, panic attacks, hot flushes and muscle and joint problems. Whilst these symptoms may not be experienced by everyone, they have the potential to impact work performance and well-being negatively.

It is always recommended that employers consider carefully how they can support their employees to remain and thrive in their jobs. Where health issues may be the cause for poor performance or increased absences, menopause-related or otherwise, it is important to consider what policies and guidance are in place to support employees and managers. Guidance should be inclusive, allowing employees to approach the subject in their own way. Menopause can still be a very personal and sensitive subject, and some people will not feel comfortable addressing this at work.

Everyone in an organisation should be made aware of how they can obtain support, and managers should be provided with guidance so that they know how to deal appropriately with any concerns.

Addressing health-related issues is far more effective in an environment that allows for and encourages open, honest discussions where the individual feels supported and understood. Management training that enables fair and positive discussions can be an important step in addressing what can still be a sensitive subject.

As we have said, menopause symptoms vary from person to person, and it is possible that symptoms may be considered a disability in some cases. So, knowing how to discuss workplace adjustments is also important. Workplace adjustments can be as simple as offering flexible break times or providing mentoring support, which may benefit all your employees regardless.

Menopause can be very isolating for some, so do not forget those people who may be working remotely and could be struggling alone. Keep in contact with your workforce and ensure that appropriate support programs and management guidance are accessible to all.

Need further advice?

If you would like advice and assistance with supporting your employees, please do not hesitate to contact [Emma Starmer](#) or any other member of the [Employment Team](#) by emailing online.enquiries@la-law.com.

This article was published on the [Dorset Chamber website](#).