

# MENOPAUSE POLICY

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## Introduction

This policy is designed to raise awareness of menopause transition and provide information and support for those who are directly or indirectly affected. It therefore contains information relevant to employees, their managers and other colleagues.

The aim of the policy is to:

- Make managers aware of their responsibility to understand how the menopause can affect staff, and how they can support those experiencing the menopause at work;
- Foster an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably instigate conversations, or engage in discussions about the menopause in a respectful and supportive manner;
- Raise wider awareness and understanding among all employees about the menopause; Enable workers experiencing the menopause to continue to be effective in their jobs;
- Outline support and reasonable adjustments available;
- Help the University to recruit and retain employees experiencing the menopause.

Although it is women and those who have transitioned as women\* who experience the physical and psychological symptoms of menopause, it is recognised that the menopause can also directly and indirectly affect others both within the workplace and at home. This can include colleagues, family members, same sex partnerships, those going through gender re-assignment and disabled colleagues.

\*Although this policy uses the term 'women', we recognise that menopause may also be experienced by colleagues who do not identify as female, so the content is intended to support anyone experiencing menopause, regardless of their gender identity. LSBU is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for everyone who works here. LSBU recognises that women experiencing the menopause, whether before, during or after this time of hormonal change and associated symptoms, may need additional consideration, support and adjustments.

The menopause is a natural event in most women's lives during which they stop having periods and experience hormonal changes such as a decrease in oestrogen levels. It usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 and typically lasts between four and eight years. LSBU is committed to developing a workplace culture that supports workers experiencing the menopause in order for them to feel confident to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for reasonable adjustments at work.

This policy is part of LSBU's commitment to ensuring the health and safety and wellbeing of all the workforce, and will ensure the workplace does not make the menopausal symptoms of employees worse.

This policy is part of LSBU's commitment to equality and diversity. We are committed to creating a workplace that respects and values each other's differences, that promotes dignity and combats prejudice, discrimination and harassment. This policy seeks to benefit the welfare of individual members of staff; retain valued employees; improve morale and performance and enhance the reputation of LSBU as an employer of choice.

LSBU recognises that many of the changes to workplace culture and adjustments offered here may not only be of benefit to workers experiencing the menopause, but to all staff.

## Scope of Policy

This policy applies to all staff who are employed at London South Bank University.  
This policy is supported by and developed with the trade unions representing the employees.

## Definitions

- Menopause - A biological stage in life when you have not had a period for 12 consecutive months.
- Perimenopause - The time leading up to the end of your periods when changes start to happen.
- Premature menopause - Can happen naturally, or because of illness or surgery.
- Andropause - The Male Menopause. (*Note the Andropause is not covered in this guidance*).

## Potential Symptoms

The menopause is a natural transition stage in most women's lives. For some it will be medically induced. It is marked by changes in the hormones and the woman stops having periods. Women may have a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms whilst experiencing the menopause and peri-menopause and may often encounter difficulties at work as a result of their symptoms.

Each woman will be affected in different ways and to different degrees over different periods of time, and menopausal symptoms can often indirectly affect their partners, families and colleagues as well.

Disabled women and those with pre-existing health conditions, may find that the menopause can aggravate their existing impairments and health conditions or even trigger new ones. Menopausal symptoms can in turn also be made worse by the disabled woman's impairment or health condition.

Some trans men may experience natural menopausal symptoms and some trans women may experience pseudo-menopausal symptoms related to their hormone therapy treatment. Some non-binary people may also experience menopausal symptoms.

LSBU recognises that for many reasons, peoples' individual experiences of the menopause may differ greatly. While some women experience no adverse symptoms of menopause, finding their confidence increases as they experience freedom from some of the more disruptive and painful aspects of having periods, others experience a range of potentially debilitating symptoms.

- During menopause, the brain and mood can be affected, causing depression and anxiety, sleep problems, night sweats, fatigue and/or dizziness, 'brain fog' (reduced concentration, poor information retention and a reduced ability to learn), unexplained mood swings, irritability and emotional outbursts.
- These symptoms can impact on an individual's performance in terms of coping strategies and reduced ability to deal with the pressure deadlines and priorities. They may also experience a lack of confidence, anxiety or panic disorder.
- Hair and nails can become thin, dry and brittle, and bleeding gums, dry mouths or taste changes and strange oral sensations may occur. The heart and lungs can be affected, causing palpitations and an increased risk of heart disease, or new/worsened allergies.

- Irregular periods brought about by an unpredictable pre-menstrual tension and menstrual cycle can cause heavy bleeding, water retention and bloating, and general skin itchiness and formication (which feels like crawling under the skin), dermatitis or thinning skin.
- Problems with muscles, joints, nerves and bones can lead to muscle pain and weakness, joint pain, osteoporosis / loss of bone density and nerve function may be affected. Sudden changes to body temperature can also result in sweats and flushes, sudden heat or facial redness.
- Other symptoms of the menopause can include loss of libido, vaginal dryness and or atrophy, weight gain, incontinence, anaemia, breast pain and headaches.
- Side effects from hormone replacement therapy (HRT), a form of treatment for menopausal symptoms for some people (although not suitable or appropriate for all).

Perimenopause, or menopause transition, begins several years before menopause, with menopausal symptoms sometimes experienced during this time. For other people, the menopause can naturally occur early or result from medical treatment such as surgery; hysterectomy, chemotherapy, aromatase inhibitors (oestrogen suppressants) and treatment for endometriosis.

As employees work through perimenopause, menopause and beyond, this can mean managing the demands of work and home life whilst also dealing with sometimes severe symptoms and other issues.

### **Support and advice for those experiencing the Menopause**

LSBU is committed to a programme of action to make this policy effective and will work with the trade unions to take positively support staff experiencing the menopause.

All staff will be provided with appropriate information and training so that they are able to better understand the effects of the menopause and be comfortable about discussing and addressing the impact that it can have on employees in carrying out their roles.

All staff training will be supported by awareness campaigns aimed at supporting the development of an understanding and supportive culture.

You may find it beneficial to research the menopause, (examples of useful links are given below), or discuss it with family or friends.

If symptoms are causing problems at work, you should speak confidentially to your manager at an early stage, to ensure the symptoms can be treated as an ongoing health issue rather than as individual instances of ill health.

Early notification will also help your manager determine the most appropriate course of action to support your individual needs. A plan should be agreed with your manager, and where appropriate, it should include details of the agreed adjustments (see below).

If you do not wish to discuss the issue with your direct line manager, you may find it helpful to have an initial discussion with a trusted colleague, an alternative manager, Occupational Health, the University's Wellbeing team and/or a trade union rep.

In some circumstances an Occupational Health (OH) referral may be useful, and advice on the referral process can be obtained from the P&OD Wellbeing Advisor and/or your HR Adviser or Business Partner, whose contact details can be found on the P&OD webpages.

LSBU recognises that some employees experiencing the menopause may find that related symptoms may impact on their health and wellbeing, and we aim to provide as much support as is reasonably practicable for individuals.

LSBU recognises that the menopause is a very personal experience and therefore different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed.

Details of other sources of support, such as our employee assistance programme and the Dignity at Work Hub, are included on our Employee Wellbeing pages on the intranet. The intranet also signposts external sources of support for employees and managers.

Some individuals may not be aware that they are going through menopause transition, so GPs can arrange for blood tests to be undertaken to confirm menopause; however, NICE guidance suggests that tests for the over 45s are unnecessary. Employees are however encouraged to consult their GP for any symptoms that are causing concern, as many of them can relate to other medical conditions.

### **Advice to and responsibilities of Managers**

Although the menopause usually impacts those in their 40s to 60s; it can impact younger people, partners and families, and those who are transitioning. As a manager, you have a duty of care to all your employees, and to support anyone affected by the menopause in the workplace either directly or indirectly.

Menopause can challenge both physical and mental wellbeing, in some cases presenting as mood swings, difficulty concentrating or memory lapses, anxiety or depression, pain and headaches, sleep disorders or fatigue.

Your role as a manager is therefore to have a supportive conversation with your employee, but you are not expected to be an expert or a healthcare professional/occupational health adviser when discussing the menopause.

Managers should ensure that all employees are aware of this policy and understand their own and the employer's responsibilities. Training on women's health issues including the menopause will be provided to all managers. This will also include any specific issues for Black women, disabled women and trans employees.

Managers (with the support of HR where requested) should encourage employees to discuss the impact of their menopausal symptoms on their work-life and encourage them to access the support and adjustments offered. They should promote a positive attitude to discussions around women's health issues.

The employee may have chosen to speak to a trade union rep, a colleague, a different manager or colleagues in the P&OD department before raising the subject with you, but even if they have done so, please advise them that they can also consult occupational health/their GP for further support.

When an employee discloses menopause-related concerns, you should gain an understanding of their likely support needs, using the information in this policy, as well as your own research using the links below. However you should also:

- Remember that every individual's issues are unique, so do not make assumptions;
- Ensure that all information shared by the employee is treated in the strictest confidence and is not shared further without their consent;

- Discuss timescales and leave requirements if this has been raised as part of the discussion, noting that perimenopause and menopause symptoms do not have an indicative timeline for resolution;
- Take account of individual and business needs when dealing with requests for special leave, being mindful of the importance of being supportive of attendance at appointments;
- Outline the support available to the employee, such as Occupational Health, the Employee Assistance Provider and the P&OD Wellbeing team.
- Treat all discussions sensitively, professionally and confidentially.
- Support employees in informing their colleagues about the situation if appropriate.

Workplace adjustments are used to remove barriers or a disadvantage, and can be helpful during menopause for agreeing and recording temporary or permanent changes. In some instances, it may be helpful to seek medical evidence and/or occupational health advice to consider whether adjustments could add value.

Any adjustments agreed should be recorded in writing with a copy provided to the employee. Where a review period is agreed, a follow up meeting should be diarised with both the manager and employee, to ensure it takes place at the agreed time.

Absences directly related to the symptoms of menopause should be recorded as sickness absences but the description added to iTrent should clarify that it related to symptoms of menopause, rather than more 'generic' reasons.

If there is an additional need for sickness absence by employees in order to manage their menopausal symptoms, managers will consider such absence as an ongoing condition requiring the consideration of reasonable adjustments and flexibility in absence procedure triggers.

Managers will consider all requests for support and adjustments sympathetically and will not discriminate against those employees who are experiencing the menopause, and put in place the required support or adjustments in a timely manner. All employees must be treated fairly and consistently. Employees need to be confident that they will not be treated less favourably if they take up any support available to employees experiencing the menopause.

LSBU recognises the potential impact of menopausal symptoms on performance by employees experiencing the menopause. Managers will seek to support staff sympathetically rather than moving directly to capability or disciplinary procedures.

### **Advice to Colleagues**

Traditionally, the menopause has not been widely discussed in workplaces, with some people finding it difficult and embarrassing to raise the subject.

Fortunately, however, due to increased media coverage and the availability of online support and guidance, conversations around managing the menopause in the workplace are becoming more normalised, and this policy aims to support this.

Menopause transition should be managed with consideration, understanding and in some circumstances, with workplace adjustments or adaptations. This will enable employees to continue to perform at their best during this transition.

Workplace 'banter' can be upsetting, and could be interpreted as harassment, so it is important that all colleagues behave with kindness, understanding and acceptance, keep an open mind, behave sensitively and avoid making assumptions.

Employees should report any instances of harassment, victimisation or discrimination experienced because of issues related to the menopause.

LSBU will take seriously and investigate any complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation, using the agreed procedures and respecting confidentiality. If an employee is found to have harassed, victimised or discriminated against another employee in relation to the menopause, then they will be seen as having committed a disciplinary offence.

It is also important that if a colleague speaks to you in confidence, this should be respected and the information kept confidential unless they give you express permission to share it.

### **Data Confidentiality**

We will process any personal data collected in accordance with our data protection policy. Data collected is held securely and accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purposes of providing the necessary support.

### **Reasonable Adjustments**

The University not only has a duty to provide a safe working environment for all employees, but also aims to facilitate an open, understanding, working environment.

In some cases it may be appropriate for a gender sensitive risk assessment to be undertaken to consider the specific needs of the employee experiencing the menopause and to ensure that the working environment will not make their symptoms worse. The risk assessment will assist with the identification of any potential adjustments that may be required.

As the symptoms associated with menopause can affect an employee's comfort and performance at work, the University commits to ensuring that adjustments and additional support will be available to those experiencing menopausal symptoms, including the facilitation of flexible working, wherever possible. Requests for flexible working could include asking for:

- a change to the pattern of hours worked;
- permission to perform work from home;
- adjustments to workload;
- a reduction in working hours; or
- more frequent breaks.

Where employees are required to work on campus, consideration will be given to the following:

- Flexible and easy access to bathroom and changing facilities;
- Ensuring there is good ventilation (e.g. a fan or opening window or adjustable air conditioning);
- Review of office seating plans so that affected employees can be near the window or open doors, or away from direct sources of heat such as radiators;
- Fitting blinds to windows;
- Access to cold drinks;

- Regular breaks in a private and quiet space, including flexibility for the staff member around the taking of breaks;
- For staff required to wear uniforms, consideration of natural fibres or looser-fitting uniforms, the provision of various sizes to accommodate short term weight fluctuations, and provision of additional spare uniforms.
- Consideration of adjustments to PPE.
- For employees who are required to travel as part of their usual work pattern, duration and frequency of travel to be reduced and increased rest breaks provided;
- Flexibility around attending relevant medical appointments;
- Temporary changes to the employee's duties, such as undertaking reduced high-visibility work like formal presentations or meetings or work on reception because it can be difficult to cope with symptoms such as hot flushes, or assessing how work is allocated or whether the employee is affected at particular points of the day.

This is not a definitive list of adjustments. LSBU, working with the trade unions, will consider additional suggestions put forward by members of staff, union reps and the menopause support group.

LSBU will provide temporary staff cover wherever possible, where there is a lengthy absence related to menopausal symptoms.

Confidential support is available for individual employees from the employee assistance programme, and this may include counselling if appropriate, in addition to practical information and advice.

Employees should discuss requests for reasonable adjustments or flexible working with their line manager/HR Business Partner/Advisor/trade union rep, and depending on the circumstances, requests may be approved either on a permanent or temporary basis. The

University will seek to be flexible and to support all requests wherever possible, and to this end will work proactively with trade unions and staff members experiencing menopause.

### **Overlap with other policies**

It may be appropriate for an employee to be supported using the University's Flexible Working or Sickness Absence policies, but as support needs will vary according to individual circumstances, managers should liaise with their HR Business Partner/Advisor to ensure fairness and consistency

The University's Reasonable Adjustments and Disability policies may also be relevant depending on individual circumstances.

### **Equality and Diversity**

We will apply this policy consistently and fairly and will not discriminate against anyone based on any relevant characteristics, including those set out in the Equality Act 2010. The menopause primarily affects women and those who have transitioned as women. However any experiencing menopause symptoms or supporting colleagues who are experiencing symptoms will be supported through this policy, regardless of gender identity.

LSBU, working with the trade unions, will develop a menopause support group in the workplace where employees affected by the menopause directly or indirectly, can share knowledge and information, gain peer support and review workplace policies that may have

an impact on staff experiencing the menopause. For further information, please contact the University's Wellbeing Team.

## **Review and monitoring**

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years, or sooner if there is a specific legislative, regulatory or service requirement or change in guidance, law or practice, including recommendations from the menopause support group and trade unions. The policy will be reviewed jointly by unions and management, on a regular basis.

The recommendations of the menopause support group on how working conditions, practices and policies may impact on staff experiencing the menopause, will be reviewed jointly by unions and management, on a regular basis.

The purpose of this monitoring and review is to identify where reasonable adjustments can be made to working conditions, practices and policies in order to make this policy effective.

LSBU **will** ensure that all new employees, supervisors and managers will receive induction on the policy.

Adequate resources will be made available to fulfil the aims of this policy. The policy will be widely promoted, and copies will be freely available and displayed in LSBU's offices and through the staff intranet.

## **Self-management for staff experiencing the menopause**

Employees experiencing the menopause are encouraged not to suffer in silence, but to consider:

- Seeking medical advice from your GP;
- Discussing symptoms with your manager or another colleague and/or your trade union rep and requesting appropriate workplace adjustments. If unsure how to start the conversation with your manager, you may choose to say something like:  
*'Thanks for meeting with me. I recently read our LSBU 'Menopause at Work' policy and wondered if I could have a chat with you about how the menopause is impacting on my daily life and my work, so that some additional supports could be put in place?'*
- Discussing symptoms with Occupational Health;
- Contacting the Employee Assistance Provider.

Employees are also encouraged to make healthier lifestyle choices to help with some of the symptoms such as:

- Eating healthily and regularly – research has shown that a balanced diet can help in alleviating some symptoms, in keeping bones healthy and in not gaining weight;
- Drinking plenty of water;
- Exercising regularly - to reduce hot flushes, improve sleep, boost mood and maintain aerobic fitness levels;
- Not smoking – to help reduce hot flushes and the risk of developing serious conditions such as cancer, heart disease and stroke;
- Ensuring alcohol intake is within recommended levels and cutting down on caffeine and spicy food – all of which can trigger hot flushes;
- Having access to natural light;
- Staying cool at night – wearing loose clothes in a cool and well-ventilated room to

- help with hot flushes and night sweats;
- Ensuring adequate rest and relaxation – to reduce stress levels and improve mood (through, for example, activities such as mindfulness, yoga and tai chi);
- Trying vaginal lubricant or moisturizer to reduce the symptoms of vaginal dryness – available either on prescription or over the counter from pharmacies.

### **Sources of support**

- [Menopause matters](#), which provides information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options;
- the [Daisy Network](#) charity, which provides support for those experiencing premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency; and
- the [Menopause Café](#), which provides information about events where strangers gather to eat cake, drink tea and discuss the menopause.
- NHS Health A-Z – [Menopause](#)
- [Women's Health Concern](#)
- [NICE](#)
- NHS - [Male Menopause](#)
- [Faculty of Occupational Medicine:](#)
- TUC – [work smart](#):
- [The Menopause Exchange](#)
- [Newson Health -Dr Louise Newson – My Menopause Doctor – Twitter and Facebook](#)