

Policy name: Menopause in the Workplace
Approved by RIAM Governance Committee: 13th May 2024
Approved by RIAM Governing Body: 11th July 2024

1. Purpose and scope

RIAM is committed promoting an inclusive and supportive working environment where all employees are treated fairly, with dignity, respect and understanding and their health and wellbeing is fully supported. RIAM believes that the publication of a menopause policy is another step in our efforts to embed a culture of dignity, respect and inclusivity in the workplace and to promote gender equality.

We recognise that employees experiencing the menopause, whether before, during or after this time of hormonal change and associated symptoms, may need additional consideration, support and adjustments. We are committed to developing an organisational culture that supports employees experiencing the menopause. We want them to feel comfortable to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for workplace adjustments.

We are committed to providing a safe working environment for all employees, including providing access to information about the menopause, signposting to appropriate healthcare and ensuring that adjustments and additional support are available to those experiencing menopause symptoms. This policy is intended to raise awareness of menopause amongst all employees, to provide guidance on workplace adjustments and supports that may be considered for employees and also outlines relevant roles and responsibilities. This policy is intended to support persons who are experiencing, or who may in the future experience, menopausal symptoms.

2. Key principles

The following key principles inform this Policy and the approach of RIAM to menopause:

- a) Promote health, safety, welfare and wellbeing at work
- b) Promote equality, diversity and inclusion
- c) Be an employer of choice.

3. Definitions

What is menopause? The word “menopause” is a catch-all word for the various stages and types of changes that women’s bodies go through at this time and includes perimenopause, post menopause, early menopause, premature menopause, and induced menopause.

Menopause refers to the time when periods stop and the ovaries lose their reproductive function. Usually, this occurs between the ages of 45 and 55. The average age that this occurs in Ireland is 51 years. Periods may start to become less frequent over a few months or years before they stop. Sometimes they can stop suddenly. In some cases, periods can become very heavy in the years coming up to menopause.

Perimenopause (sometimes known as menopause transition) refers to the lead-up to menopause, when the signs and symptoms of menopause are first observed and ends one year after the final menstrual period. The age in which this begins varies, but the average age is 45 years old. However, some women start to experience symptoms in their 30s or in rare cases, even younger. Perimenopause can last several years and can affect physical, emotional, mental and social well-being. The Health Service Executive report that typically perimenopause symptoms can start up to 7 years before your period stops. Menopause is reached when a person is 12 months past their final period.

Menopause is marked by the end of monthly menstruation (also known as a menstrual period or 'period') due to loss of ovarian follicular function. This means that the ovaries no longer release eggs. The regularity and length of the menstrual cycle varies across the reproductive life span but the age at which natural menopause occurs is generally between 45 and 55 years for women worldwide. Natural menopause is deemed to have occurred after 12 consecutive months without menstruation for which there is no other obvious physiological or pathological cause and in the absence of clinical intervention. Menopause is a retrospective diagnosis as it can only be made after a full year of the absence of menstruation.

Post-menopause As soon as a woman has been through menopause, they immediately become postmenopausal and they are postmenopausal for the rest of their life. In this third phase of the menopause transition, they may still experience symptoms, commonly for a further five to seven years, though many experience symptoms for longer than this.

Early menopause is when a woman's periods stop before the age of 45. It can happen by itself or as a side effect of some treatments.

Premature menopause, also known as premature ovarian insufficiency. While uncommon, is when a woman experiences menopause before the age of 40.

Induced menopause refers to menstrual periods that stop after surgical removal of the ovaries, chemotherapy or radiation damage to the ovaries, or from the use of other medications to intentionally induce menopause as part of the treatment of certain diseases. Induced menopause can happen at any age.

4. Menopause symptoms

Individuals may experience a spectrum of physical and psychological symptoms associated with menopause. The severity and duration of the symptoms will vary significantly. Some may experience multiple symptoms, either physical, psychological or a combination of both, over a prolonged period of time, and others may not.

Common physical symptoms

- Hot flushes • Night sweats • Difficulty sleeping • Fatigue • Lack of energy • Vaginal dryness and pain, itching or discomfort • Reduced sex drive (libido) • Discomfort during sex • Irregular periods • Headaches • Heart palpitations (a fast-beating, fluttering or

pounding heart) • Recurring UTI's • Loss of muscle • Weight gain • Joint aches and pains
• Dry mouth and skin

Common psychological symptoms

• Low mood and irritability • Anxiety • Problems with memory or concentration such as brain fog • Tearfulness • Loss of confidence and self esteem

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Human Resources (HR)

The Human Resource (HR) function plays a pivotal role in raising organisational wide awareness of menopause and in creating and embedding a culture that is supportive and inclusive. This can be achieved by:

- Engaging senior management team to secure buy-in and endorsement for menopause policies and initiatives.
- Developing and implementing a menopause policy in their workplace.
- Undertaking relevant training to gain an understanding of how work patterns could impact symptoms and supporting flexible working arrangements, where possible.
- Providing training and awareness supports for line managers, including guidance on their roles and responsibilities in supporting employees in line with organisational policies.

Manager

- Managers have an important role to play in ensuring that employees affected by menopausal symptoms receive the right support, as they would with any other health condition. Managers are not expected to be experts when discussing menopause but they should have an understanding of what supports are available to meet the needs of their employees. In providing support and guidance to employees, managers should:
- Ensure all employees are aware of and familiar with their organisation's Menopause Policy.
- Undertake relevant training on menopause symptoms and the necessary workplace adjustments and supports that may be required.
- Promote a positive attitude to discussions around women's health issues, including menopause, and help to create an environment where employees feel able to discuss their experience of menopause.

- Respect an employee's right not to discuss personal issues. They may be more comfortable talking to a colleague or another manager or a member of the VHI EAP scheme.
- Encourage employees to access support and guidance from their personal healthcare provider.
- Provide a private, confidential place for the staff member to discuss how their symptoms impact them at work. Encourage employees to be open about discussing the impact of their menopausal symptoms on health, wellbeing and work life balance.
- Ensure any discussion is treated with sensitivity and professionalism and that confidentiality is maintained at all times.
- Listen carefully to what the employee is saying and avoid any assumptions, judgements or downplaying the situation.
- Discuss and be supportive of any upcoming healthcare appointments or leave requirements.
- Investigate any complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation using the relevant Dignity at Work and Grievance Procedures.

Employee

All employees have a responsibility to contribute to a respectful working environment, be willing to help and support their colleagues, and understand that colleagues may need adjustments to manage their menopausal symptoms. In terms of individual employees experiencing symptoms associated with menopause:

- It is important that employees take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing. If an employee is experiencing symptoms associated with menopause, they should first and foremost seek advice from their health care provider.
- If an employee is experiencing menopausal symptoms and feel they may need support at work, they should speak with their manager.
- Early discussions can help determine the most appropriate course of action, how to overcome any barriers and agree what support is needed.
- If an employee does not feel comfortable discussing the impact of menopause with their own manager, they should be encouraged to request a discussion with: – an alternative manager – a trusted colleague – a member of the VHI EAP scheme
- Employees should monitor how their symptoms are impacting them and if the supports put in place by their manager are effective in supporting the management of their symptoms while at work.
- If employees are experiencing menopause symptoms so severe that they are temporarily unable to work, sick leave can be availed of and managed as per Circular 12/2023: Management of Sick Leave in the Civil Service. See Section 7 Menopause and Sick Leave.

6. Workplace adjustments

Menopause, in and of itself, is not an illness. However, some of the symptoms of menopause can cause illness and may impact on work performance and wellbeing in the workplace. There may be times when an employee who is experiencing severe symptoms may need adjustments to support them to continue working.

The purpose of workplace adjustment is to provide a supportive working environment by making appropriate adjustments and removing barriers wherever possible.

Office and Faculties should not take a one-size-fits-all approach and should instead explore options with employees to determine what support would be helpful based on the nature of the symptoms they are experiencing. Employers should be flexible and make adjustments where possible because minor adjustments can make a significant difference to the quality of working life for employees experiencing symptoms associated with menopause.

Office and Faculties should consider what practical measures they can implement to support an employee and lessen the impact of menopausal symptoms at work and to also ensure that working conditions do not exacerbate symptoms. Depending on the circumstances, requests for workplace adjustments may be approved on a temporary basis with ongoing review to ensure that both the employee and the manager are satisfied that the arrangements in place are adequate for the needs of the employee and the business needs of RIAM. Requests should be considered on a case by case basis, balancing the needs of the employee and RIAM. Managers should confirm in writing any arrangements agreed verbally. This is particularly important if **a request has been made informally and has been agreed as a temporary measure. A Template Record of Confidential Discussion and Agreed Supportive Arrangement is available at Appendix 1 of this policy.**

Workplace adjustments relating to the physical working environment including but not limited to:

- Temperature
- Ventilation
- Lighting
- Provision of changing facilities.

Flexible working allows an employee the opportunity to manage their menopausal symptoms by altering their working hours/pattern. Requests for flexible working could include:

- A change to the pattern of hours worked, for example, managers could consider agreeing to a later start time where an employee is experiencing sleepless nights. This may help alleviate tiredness at work.
- The option to avail of blended working arrangement.

Managers may also consider making adjustments to work design and allocation. Some examples may include but are not limited to:

- Allowing flexibility to focus on less intensive tasks or switch to different tasks on days when an employee is struggling with difficult symptoms.
- Enabling temporary changes to work allocation, in consultation with the employee, to ensure that the type and volume of work is appropriate.

Examples of adjustments for related symptoms:

Brain Fog

- Realistic goal setting
- Allow for flexible breaks
- Provision of quiet workspaces
- Give clear communication
- Conduct regular and informal check ins
- Suggest talking to their GP
- Suggest speaking to VHI EAP
- Ask what might be helpful in terms of managing work Isolation
- Taking tea breaks with colleagues
- Encourage anchor days, bringing team together
- Establish a buddy system
- Conduct regular and informal check-ins

Low Self Esteem

- Establish and encourage 1-1 mentoring
- Examine the pace of work
- Establish a buddy system
- Conduct regular and informal check-ins
- Provide considered and constructive feedback

Insomnia/ Difficulty sleeping

- Provision of flexible working patterns
- Provision of temporary Shift/Rota adjustments

Heavy Periods

- Ensure easy access to toilet facilities
- Allow for sufficient breaks to use the bathroom

Hot Flushes

- Provision of desk fan
- Provide access to fresh drinking water
- Provide access to a quiet area
- Allow for short breaks to step out into the fresh air
- Review the ergonomics of the office e.g. situation of the person's desk, proximity to the facilities

7. Menopause and sick leave

Notwithstanding that menopause is not classified as an illness, there may be instances where an employee becomes unwell as a result of menopause symptoms and may need to avail of sick leave. Employees should follow procedures for reporting illness as outlined under [the RIAM Sick Leave Policy](#)

As this issue is often perceived as intensely personal, a manager may not be aware that any impacts are menopause-related. A manager should make all reasonable efforts to ensure an employee is able to share information confidentially to help manage their symptoms whilst at work. The absence/absences should be treated consistently and supportively in line with other health conditions and sick leave policy. Managers should note that new courses of treatment can result in temporary improvement or deterioration which can impact the employee's absence pattern. Managers should be cautious about taking decisions based on temporary changes in absence levels.

8. Supporting performance during menopause

Menopause could have a negative effect on an employee's ability to perform at work due to tiredness from a difficulty in sleeping, mood changes or problems with memory and concentration. Managers should take into account the impact of menopause on an employee's performance and be as flexible as possible when considering what adjustments can be made to a role or working conditions to help an employee maintain performance levels. For some, menopausal symptoms can last for a considerable and undefined period of time. Managers and employees should consider this when looking at both workplace adjustments and performance.

9. Confidentiality

Every employee has the right to privacy in respect of their medical status. It is essential that managers ensure that all information shared by the employee is treated in the strictest confidence and is only shared with others where necessary and with the consent of the employee. It is good practice to discuss with the employee how they wish any questions from their peers/colleagues to be managed. Confidentiality must be respected unless the employee indicates that they approve of their team being informed on their behalf in a tactful and respectful way

10. Further resources

Department of Health Menopause awareness: gov.ie - Menopause (www.gov.ie) • HSE Menopause Overview: Menopause - Overview - HSE.ie • CIPD Menopause at Work: The menopause at work: A guide for people professionals | CIPD www.cipd.org/uk/topics/menopause/

Employee VHI EAP Scheme

11. Responsibility

HR is responsible for overseeing this policy.

12. Legislation and Regulation

[Gov.ie Menopause in the Workplace Policy Framework](#)

[Amendments to the Public Sector Sick Leave Scheme September 2023](#)

13. Document Control

Approved by RIAM Governing body: 11th July 2024

Next review: Academic year 2027

Appendix 1: Template Record of Confidential Discussion and Agreed Supportive Arrangement

Confidential Discussion Template

Name	
Job title	
Office/Faculty	
Present at the meeting (line manager name and position)	
Date of discussion	
Summary of Discussion	
Agreed Actions	
Date of Next meeting	
Signed (member of staff)	
Signed (line manager)	