**What is the menopause?**

The menopause is caused by a change in the balance of the body’s sex hormones, which occurs as a women gets older. Menopause literally means the last menstrual period and is a natural phase of life that happens when the body stops producing as much of the hormone oestrogen. Some non-binary, intersex and trans people can also experience menopausal symptoms because of the hormonal changes in the body.

The menopause usually occurs between age 45 – 55. Menopausal symptoms can begin several years before and for that reason it is often thought of as a transition. This is known as the peri-menopause and for some this can start as early as their twenties or as late as their late forties.

Around 1 in 100 experience the menopause before the age of 40. This is known as premature ovarian insufficiency (POI), or premature menopause. Often, there is no clear cause for the early onset of menopause, but it can also be as a result of surgery (for example hysterectomy, oophorectomy), illness or treatment (such as chemotherapy).

**Going through the menopause?**

This guide sets out the ways in which the University can support you to reduce the impact of menopause symptoms at work and provides information to help you manage your menopause transition. It includes:

* A [Symptom Checklist](https://stir.sharepoint.com/%3Aw%3A/r/sites/HRTeamSite/Shared%20Documents/Health%20%26%20wellbeing%20%26%20EDI/Campaigns/2022/Menopause%20Awareness%20Month%20%28Oct%29/Menopause%20Toolkit/Menopause%20Symptom%20Checker.docx?d=w42e72d90c83b4c9283ff373614d45d7e&csf=1&web=1&e=cMPwhg)and Personal Assessment to help you identify and note down your symptoms
* A [Discussion plan](https://stir.sharepoint.com/%3Aw%3A/r/sites/HRTeamSite/Shared%20Documents/Health%20%26%20wellbeing%20%26%20EDI/Campaigns/2022/Menopause%20Awareness%20Month%20%28Oct%29/Menopause%20Toolkit/Discussion%20Plan.docx?d=wff807e0ad526423a9da73d8b53618373&csf=1&web=1&e=sC5DVK)to aid a conversation with your line manager if your symptoms are impacting on your job
* Examples of the ways symptoms may be able to be accommodated at work through reasonable adjustments
* A [symptom tracker](https://stir.sharepoint.com/%3Aw%3A/r/sites/HRTeamSite/Shared%20Documents/Health%20%26%20wellbeing%20%26%20EDI/Campaigns/2022/Menopause%20Awareness%20Month%20%28Oct%29/Menopause%20Toolkit/Symptom%20Tracker.docx?d=wc2aecb7d94314edc867eed4281493ad7&csf=1&web=1&e=gksdER)which may help your conversation about the menopause with a GP.
* Signposting to resources and support external to the University

There is a separate manager guide which explains some of the challenges of the menopause and sets out the ways managers can support staff experiencing difficulties in their roles due to menopause symptoms. We know that menopause might be a subject you don’t traditionally speak about and so managers will deal with your situation sensitively and completely confidentially, unless you want other colleagues to be involved. If you don’t feel able to discuss this directly with your manager you could approach a more senior manager, contact your HR Partner, or ask a colleague to accompany you to support you during the conversation.

**Managing your symptoms at work**

**Identify your symptoms**

Not everyone is aware they are in the peri-menopause stage or entering the menopause. Not everyone suffers symptoms that affect them at work. You may have only minor symptoms that don’t disrupt your normal way of life and you may feel positively about this life change.

However, most colleagues in this transition will feel the effect of some symptoms, and for some these will be significant. It is important to understand your own symptoms and how these are affecting you at work.

This [symptom checklist](https://stir.sharepoint.com/%3Aw%3A/r/sites/HRTeamSite/Shared%20Documents/Health%20%26%20wellbeing%20%26%20EDI/Campaigns/2022/Menopause%20Awareness%20Month%20%28Oct%29/Menopause%20Toolkit/Menopause%20Symptom%20Checker.docx?d=w42e72d90c83b4c9283ff373614d45d7e&csf=1&web=1&e=l8jvHl) provides a prompt to help you think about what symptoms you may be experiencing. Take some time to work through the checklist as this will help you identify if or how the symptoms are impacting on you at work. For example, sleepless nights can lead to tiredness and can affect concentration. Memory loss can be embarrassing and can affect confidence in meetings. Heavy periods can affect how long you can sit in a meeting, how long you can stand up teaching or how long you can continue a cleaning shift before needing to go to the toilet before returning to your task. For some, hot flushes can be distressing, embarrassing and difficult to manage in a room of people.

You may want to make a personal assessment of your own symptoms on the checklist.

**Seek support with job related challenges**

Your personal assessment is an important starting point when planning a conversation with your manager as it will help you to think about the issues you face at work, and to make suggestions about possible adjustments that might alleviate those challenges. Some [examples](https://stir.sharepoint.com/%3Aw%3A/r/sites/HRTeamSite/Shared%20Documents/Health%20%26%20wellbeing%20%26%20EDI/Campaigns/2022/Menopause%20Awareness%20Month%20%28Oct%29/Menopause%20Toolkit/Examples%20of%20Adjustments.docx?d=w1c430ea4bae64aa18ce182f7a93ba9cb&csf=1&web=1&e=IzsHvA) of potential reasonable adjustments are included in the manager toolkit.

You may find the opportunity to raise the subject in your regular check-in meetings with your line manager. Talking to staff about their wellbeing is a priority at these meetings, and your manager may have already asked how you are feeling generally. This is the ideal time to mention any difficulties you’re having.

You may feel sensitive about this type of conversation. Being well prepared should help and this [discussion plan template](https://stir.sharepoint.com/%3Aw%3A/r/sites/HRTeamSite/Shared%20Documents/Health%20%26%20wellbeing%20%26%20EDI/Campaigns/2022/Menopause%20Awareness%20Month%20%28Oct%29/Menopause%20Toolkit/Discussion%20Plan.docx?d=wff807e0ad526423a9da73d8b53618373&csf=1&web=1&e=lmaiwl) sets out some of the points you may want to raise. It will also help you to focus and keep track during the meeting, and ensure you raise all of your issues. If you let your manager know you’d like to talk about the menopause in advance of the meeting this will give them time to build their knowledge of the subject and familiarise themselves with the resources via the manager toolkit. This will help them to think about the best ways to support you.

Your manager will already have a risk assessment in place covering the working environment. It may be helpful to review that together in light of your own symptoms. This would include considering factors such as temperature and ventilation, uniforms, access to rest areas, access to toilet facilities and access to cold water.

**How can I manage the broader impact of menopause?**

Menopause can affect many areas of life, including for example relationships and family life. During the menopause, there is also a higher risk of heart disease and osteoporosis, so looking after any possible effects on your long term health is important. Unfortunately there’s no ‘one size fits all’ solution to manage menopause but:

* Many people visit their GP:
* Most GPs are offering online or telephone appointments so you do not need to wait until after the pandemic to speak to them, and in a lot of cases menopause can be diagnosed by symptoms alone with no need for a blood test. Sometimes treatment works right from the start, but other times it needs some adjustment, so it’s a good idea to get started as soon as possible.

* A GP is there to help and support you, and you should feel comfortable and confident in talking to them about your symptoms, and any help you need. Some doctors have special training in treating perimenopause and menopause so will be able to provide more effective advice. So, that you know what to expect from your GP when discussing your symptoms and associated treatment, you may wish to read the [NHS Inform information](https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/sexual-and-reproductive/the-menopause)before your appointment.

* It is also possible to ask if there is a menopause clinic in your area. There are regional clinics, specifically devoted to menopause. If there is one available and you think this would be helpful, ask for a referral.

* When visiting your GP you will want to describe the symptoms you are experiencing. This [symptom tracker](https://stir.sharepoint.com/%3Aw%3A/r/sites/HRTeamSite/Shared%20Documents/Health%20%26%20wellbeing%20%26%20EDI/Campaigns/2022/Menopause%20Awareness%20Month%20%28Oct%29/Menopause%20Toolkit/Symptom%20Tracker.docx?d=wc2aecb7d94314edc867eed4281493ad7&csf=1&web=1&e=T6fAok)may help you to keep a record of your symptoms and their severity for a period prior to your appointment.

* Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) can be helpful, but this can only be prescribed by a doctor after they have assessed the possible risks on an individual basis. It is not helpful to, or suitable for everyone.
* Other options that can reduce or stop some of the symptoms may include lifestyle changes, e.g. stopping smoking and reducing alcohol intake, or self-care such as eating a healthy diet, drinking plenty of water, ensuring adequate rest and relaxation, and taking regular exercise. There are a large number of organisations offering information, advice, complementary therapies and support for menopause management, and some are listed in the resources section below.
* Reducing stress is important and seeking support for the emotional changes can be very helpful.

**Further advice and support**

There’s a lot of menopause information, advice and support available from lots of sources. For illustrative purposes we’ve listed a selection here but aren’t making recommendations about any of those listed or endorsing their advice or approach and staff are recommended to do their own research.

[NHS Inform – The Menopause](https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/sexual-and-reproductive/the-menopause)

[NICE Guidelines](https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23)

[Menopause Matters](https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/)

[Daisy Network](https://www.daisynetwork.org/) – advice on early menopause

[Rock my menopause](https://rockmymenopause.com/get-informed/transgender-health/) – Transgender health

[Well online](https://www.well-online.co.uk/mind-body/health/understanding-menopause/) – Understanding menopause