

# **Menopause and the Workplace Guidelines**



## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	3
WHAT IS MENOPAUSE? .....	3
SYMPTOMS OF MENOPAUSE.....	3
WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MYSELF? .....	4
Lifestyle.....	4
Complementary and Alternative Therapies.....	5
Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT).....	5
WHAT CAN MY MANAGER DO TO SUPPORT ME?.....	5
How to instigate a conversation with an employee who you think may be experiencing menopause symptoms.....	6
How to approach a sensitive conversation .....	6
Discussing reasonable adjustments.....	7
How do I initiate a conversation about workplace adjustments?.....	7
ASSOCIATED CWICB DOCUMENTS .....	7
Appendix 1: Checklist to support women to identify their symptoms.....	8
Appendix 2: Menopause symptoms, how that may affect you in work and possible adjustment .....	9
Appendix 3 Confidential Colleague discussion – template .....	13
Appendix 4: Menopause Advice Sheet – How to talk to your GP.....	15
Appendix 5 Sources of help and external links .....	17

## INTRODUCTION

NHS Coventry and Warwickshire Integrated Care Board (CWICB) recognises that experiencing the menopause and associated symptoms, whether before, during or after this time of hormonal change may impact on the working lives of some women and is committed to fostering an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably instigate conversations or engage in discussions about the menopause in a respectful and supportive manner.

These guidelines aim to support staff to:

- ♣ Understand more about their menopause, the symptoms and possible treatments
- ♣ Give women the confidence to discuss this with their line manager
- ♣ Provide reassurance regarding adjustments which could be made to support women at work while experiencing menopause

And for managers to:

- ♣ Understand how menopause affects their staff
- ♣ Understand how women may need support and be more confident to have a conversation with them about this
- ♣ Understand the ways in which menopause may affect performance at work
- ♣ Be able to signpost towards support

CWICB recognises that menopausal symptoms can also affect transgender people and non-binary people and 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.

## WHAT IS MENOPAUSE?

The menopause is a natural transition stage in most women's lives. It is the point at which oestrogen levels decline, and periods stop. Menopausal symptoms are typically experienced for several years so it is best described as a "transition" rather than a one-off event. The average age for a female to reach menopause is 51, however it can be earlier or later due to surgery, illness or other reasons.

### ***Perimenopause***

Perimenopause is the phase leading up to menopause when hormone balance starts to change, and when menopausal symptoms are experienced. This can occur years before the menopause and for some this can mean in their twenties. For some it will be medically induced.

### ***Post Menopause***

Post Menopause is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a period has not occurred for twelve consecutive months

## SYMPTOMS OF MENOPAUSE

Menopause is very individual and not every female will notice every symptom, or even need help or support. However it is recognised that 75% of females do experience some symptoms with 25% of these experiencing severe symptoms. Additionally people will be affected in different ways and



to different degrees over different periods of time with menopausal symptoms often indirectly affecting partners, families and colleagues as well.

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

Menopausal symptoms can include;

- ♣ Hot flushes – a quite common symptom that can start in the face, neck or chest, before spreading upwards or downwards, may include sweating, the skin becoming red and patchy, and a quicker or stronger heart rate
- ♣ Heavy and painful periods and clots, leaving those affected exhausted as well as practically needing to change sanitary wear more frequently. Some affected may become anaemic;
- ♣ Night sweats, restless leg syndrome and sleep disturbance;
- ♣ Low mood, irritability, increased anxiety, panic attacks, fatigue, poor concentration, loss of confidence and memory problems;
- ♣ Urinary problems – more frequent urinary incontinence and urinary tract infections such as cystitis. It is common to have an urgent need to pass urine or a need to pass it more often than usual;
- ♣ Irritated skin – including dry and itchy skin or formication, and dry eyes. Also vaginal symptoms of dryness, itching and discomfort, increased incidence of vaginal thrush
- ♣ Joint and muscle aches and stiffness;
- ♣ Weight gain;
- ♣ Headaches and migraines;
- ♣ Menopausal hair loss;
- ♣ Poor concentration and inability to make decisions (“brain fog”);
- ♣ Memory issues such as forgetfulness;
- ♣ Poor sleep patterns resulting in being tired during shift working;
- ♣ Osteoporosis – the strength and density of bones are affected by the loss of oestrogen, increasing the risk of the bone-thinning disease osteoporosis;
- ♣ Side effects from hormone replacement therapy (HRT), a form of treatment for menopausal symptoms for some people although not suitable or appropriate for all

Menopausal symptoms may also exacerbate impairments and conditions in staff who may already be finding it difficult to manage at work.

## WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MYSELF?

### Lifestyle

A healthy lifestyle can minimise the effects of the menopause. Here are some suggestions:

- A healthy diet is essential. Hormone levels (namely oestrogen) fall during menopause and this can increase the risk of heart disease and osteoporosis. Eating foods low in saturated fat and salt may help to reduce blood pressure and foods rich in calcium and vitamin D may help to strengthen bones. Some women take dietary supplements for the right balance

- Keeping physically active may help with any increased feelings of anxiety. Regular exercise helps to convert stress into positive energy and guards against heart disease. Try to mix it up e.g. cycling, swimming, running or aerobics
- Quitting smoking may help to reduce the risk of osteoporosis and heart disease, which is the most common form of death in women. There is also evidence that smoking may lead to an earlier menopause and trigger hot flushes
- Try to limit drinking alcohol to no more than 2-3 units per day and have at least one alcohol-free day a week. Alcohol increases flushes and is associated with an increase risk of breast cancer
- Studies show that a late menopause can increase the risk of breast cancer. Make sure you attend any health screening but also check your breasts regular for any changes and seek advice if they occur
- Sharing symptoms and solutions with colleagues, particularly those also experiencing menopausal symptoms, will create a support system and possibly give you new coping strategies to try
- Hormone imbalance during menopause can lead to added stress and possibly depression. Try relaxation techniques and counselling if you're really struggling
- Speak to your GP about available treatment options and find out more about the menopause from available sources of information (see [Appendix 4](#) How to Speak to Your GP and [Appendix 5](#) for some suggestions)

### Complementary and Alternative Therapies

There is limited research to support how effective or safe complementary and alternative therapies are. They may sometimes help with symptoms but are unlikely to have a significant impact on bone strength, heart or blood vessels. Things to try could include acupuncture, aromatherapy, herbal treatments, homeopathy, hypnotherapy, yoga and reflexology.

### Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

HRT is the most effective and widely used treatment for menopausal symptoms. It works by replacing the hormone oestrogen that is lost during the menopause and has proven benefits as a remedy for hot flushes, disturbed sleep, vaginal symptoms and some mood disorders. However, some women experience side effects such as breast tenderness, leg cramps, nausea, bloating, irritability and depression. These symptoms usually go away after the first few months, but a change in type, dose (oral, tablet, transdermal, patch or gel) or route of HRT may be required.

Remember, every woman experiences the menopause differently and if you are struggling, advice and support is available. Be aware of any changes and consult your GP for advice. Above all, look after yourself.

## WHAT CAN MY MANAGER DO TO SUPPORT ME?

In the first instance employees experiencing the menopause are encouraged to let their line manager know, or an alternative contact such as Occupational Health or Human Resources if they experience symptoms that may impact on their work so that appropriate support is provided.

The role of line managers in supporting team members experiencing menopause transition is crucial. The CWICB recognises that the menopause is a very personal experience and therefore



different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed. Effective management of team members with menopausal symptoms that are impacting on their work will help to improve team's morale, retain valuable skills and talent and reduce sickness absence.

As a line manager you can help by:

- ♣ Familiarising yourself with these menopause guidelines and associated appendices so you can best advise and support staff
- ♣ Being empathetic and respectful, enabling an employee to feel comfortable about raising a health issue like the menopause
- ♣ Being willing to have open discussions about the menopause, treating conversations with respect and confidentiality
- ♣ Holding regular and informal one-to-ones with members of your team so the forum is already there for a conversation about any health changes, including the menopause
- ♣ Asking people how they are on a regular basis will help to create an open and inclusive culture and encourage someone to raise any concerns
- ♣ Not assuming anything – everyone is different so take your lead from the individual
- ♣ Using the guidance in **Appendix 3** to create a plan with the member of staff experiencing symptoms of menopause to make reasonable adjustments in the workplace, if required
- ♣ Signposting the employee for further advice, such as their GP, Occupational Health or the Employee Assistance Programme, if required

### **How to instigate a conversation with an employee who you think may be experiencing menopause symptoms**

Managers should proactively approach employees in a sensitive way and in accordance with the ICB's Values if they notice they may be having difficulties with the menopause. Some symptoms can manifest themselves in a particularly intimate, even visible, way so it is understandable why many women could feel embarrassed and reluctant to discuss the impact of their symptoms. However, most people would appreciate a concerned and genuine enquiry about how they are. If you are concerned about someone's wellbeing or performance ask general, open questions such as:

- ♣ 'How are you doing at the moment?'
- ♣ 'I've noticed you've been arriving late recently and I wondered if you're ok?'
- ♣ 'You don't seem yourself lately, is everything ok?'

It's up to the individual to disclose any particular symptoms or health issues they may be experiencing. Approach conversations with empathy and try not to be embarrassed by the issue and how the individual is feeling. Regular one-to-ones are a good opportunity to start the conversation which should always be in a private, confidential, informal setting.

### **How to approach a sensitive conversation**

It's important to set the right tone when opening a sensitive conversation but try not to worry too much. Here are a few tips:

- ♣ Avoid interruptions by switching off phones and ensuring you won't be disturbed
- ♣ Ask simple, open, non-judgemental questions
- ♣ Avoid judgemental or patronising responses
- ♣ Speak calmly
- ♣ Maintain eye contact
- ♣ Listen actively and carefully

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- ♣ Encourage the employee to talk
  - ♣ Give the employee ample opportunity to explain the situation in their own words
  - ♣ Show empathy and understanding
  - ♣ Be prepared for silences and be patient
  - ♣ Focus on the person not the problem
  - ♣ Avoid making assumptions or being prescriptive

### Discussing reasonable adjustments

Certain aspects of a job or the workplace may represent a barrier for someone experiencing menopausal symptoms. Line managers have a responsibility to consider and put in place reasonable adjustments to alleviate or remove these barriers wherever possible so employees can carry on performing in their role.

### How do I initiate a conversation about workplace adjustments?

Begin by having a confidential, two-way conversation with the person concerned to identify the specific issues they are experiencing. Record any specific needs and agreed adjustments and review these on a regular basis as menopausal symptoms may fluctuate over time.

If required, consider involving occupational health to help identify appropriate adjustments to help ease the impact of their symptoms.

Adjustments will usually be agreed on a temporary basis. **Appendix 2** shows a table outlining possible menopausal symptoms, how they may affect employees and possible adjustments which could be made. Any agreed adjustments need to suit both parties and will be dependent upon service delivery restrictions. Severe menopausal symptoms and their consequences may combine to have a substantial adverse effect on normal day to day activities, potentially meeting the legal definition of a disability under the Equality Act 2010. When advised that symptoms could be considered a disability, such as following Occupational Health advice, reasonable adjustments should be considered, eg triggers for absence managements.

## ASSOCIATED CWICB DOCUMENTS

- Health and Safety Policy
- Absence Management Policy
- Special Leave Policy
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Flexible Working Policy
- Agile Working Policy

## Appendix 1: Checklist to support women to identify their symptoms

### DO I HAVE SYMPTOMS WHICH COULD INDICATE I AM GOING THROUGH MENOPAUSE?

Review the list below to see if you are experiencing any of these symptoms:

Physical Symptoms	All the time	Regularly	Sometimes	Never
Palpitations (heart beating faster)				
Hot flushes/night sweats				
Struggling with sleep				
Skin issues (dryness, itching, acne)				
Weight gain or bloating				
UTI (urine infections)				
Bladder leakage/need to go to toilet more frequently				
Vaginal dryness				
Pain 'down below'				
Heavy dragging feeling in vagina				
Breast tenderness				
Changes to periods (may be difficult to tell if taking contraceptives)				
Fatigue				
Feeling dizzy or faint				
Numbness in parts of body				
Aching joints				
Psychological Symptoms	All the time	Regularly	Sometimes	Never
Tearful				
Anxious/worrying				
Mood swings				
Low confidence				
Memory problems				
Low mood or depression				
Panic attacks				
Irritability				
Unable to concentrate				
Inability to multi task				
Brain fog				

- ♣ This list is not exhaustive
- ♣ Remember some of these symptoms may be indicators of other medical conditions so don't just ignore them
- ♣ If you are aged 45-55 years and present to your GP with a range of these symptoms you would not necessarily need a blood test to confirm whether you are in menopause

## Appendix 2: Menopause symptoms, how that may affect you in work and possible adjustment

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically including, but not exhaustively or exclusively, those listed below. Support for women should be considered as detailed. This is not a definitive list of adjustments and the CWICB will consider additional suggestions put forward by members of staff.

SYMPTOMS	EXAMPLES OF WORKPLACE FACTORS WHICH COULD WORSEN OR INTERACT WITH SYMPTOMS	SUGGESTED ADJUSTMENTS
Daytime sweats / hot flushes / palpitations	Lack of access to rest breaks or suitable break areas. Hot flushes and facial redness may cause women to feel self-conscious, or the sensation may affect concentration or train of thought	<p>Be flexible about additional breaks.</p> <p>If possible allow a fan on their desk or to move nearer a window or away from a heat source</p> <p>Allow time out and access to fresh air.</p> <p>Easy access to drinking water</p> <p>Ensure a quiet area/room is available.</p> <p>Ensure cover is available so workers can leave their post if needed</p>
Night time sweats and hot flushes. Insomnia or sleep disturbance	Rigid start/finish times and lack of flexible working options may increase fatigue at work due to lack of sleep	<p>Consider temporary adjustment of hours to accommodate any difficulties</p> <p>Allow flexible working</p> <p>Provide the option of alternate tasks/duties</p> <p>Make allowance for potential additional need for sickness absence</p> <p>Reassure employees they will not be penalised or suffer detriment if they require adjustments to workload or performance management targets</p>
Urinary problems; for example increased frequency, urgency, and increased risk of urinary infections	<p>Lack of access to adequate toilet facilities may increase the risk of infection and cause embarrassment and an increase in stress levels</p> <p>Staff member may need to access toilet facilities more frequently, may need to drink more fluids and may feel unwell</p>	<p>Ensure easy access to toilet and washroom facilities</p> <p>Allow for more frequent breaks during work to go to the toilet</p> <p>Ensure easy access to supply of cold drinking water</p>

		<p>Take account of peripatetic worker schedules and allow them to access facilities during their working day</p> <p>Make allowances for potential additional need to sickness absence</p>
Irregular and/or heavy periods	<p>Lack of access to adequate toilet facilities may increase the risk of infection and cause distress/embarrassment and an increase in stress levels</p> <p>Staff member may need to access toilet and washroom facilities more frequently</p>	<p>Ensure easy access to well-maintained toilet and washroom or shower facilities</p> <p>Ensure storage space is available for a change of clothes</p> <p>Allow for more frequent breaks in work to go to the toilet/washroom</p> <p>Ensure sanitary products are readily available</p> <p>Take account of peripatetic workers schedule and allow them to access facilities during their working day</p> <p>Ensure cover is available so staff can leave their posts if needed</p>
Skin irritation, dryness or itching	<p>Unsuitable workplace temperatures and humidity may increase skin irritation, dryness and itching</p> <p>There may be discomfort, an increased risk of infection and a reduction in the barrier function of skin</p>	<p>Ensure comfortable working temperatures and humidity.</p> <p>Ensure easy access to well-maintained toilet and washroom or shower facilities</p>
Muscular aches and bone and joint pains	<p>Lifting and moving, as well as work involving repetitive movements or adopting static postures, may be more uncomfortable and there may be an increased risk of injury</p>	<p>Make any necessary adjustments through review of risk assessments and work schedules/tasks and keep under review</p> <p>Consider providing alternative lower-risk tasks</p> <p>Follow guidance and advice on manual handling and preventing MSD's (musculoskeletal disorders)</p>
Headaches	<p>Headaches may be triggered or worsened by many workplace factors such as artificial lighting, poor air quality, exposure to chemicals, screen work, workplace stress, poor posture, unsuitable workstations, or workplace temperatures</p>	<p>Ensure comfortable working temperatures, humidity and good air quality</p> <p>Ensure access to natural light and ability to adjust artificial light</p> <p>Allow additional rest breaks</p> <p>Ensure a quiet area/room is available</p>

		<p>Offer noise-reducing headphones to wear in open offices</p> <p>Have time out to take medication</p> <p>Carry out Display Screen Equipment (DSE) and stress risk assessments</p>
<p>Dry eyes</p>	<p>Unsuitable workplace temperatures, humidity, poor air quality and excessive screen work may increase dryness in the eyes, discomfort, eye strain and increase the risk of infection</p>	<p>Ensure comfortable working temperatures, humidity and good air quality</p> <p>Allow additional breaks from screen-based work</p> <p>Carry out DSE assessment</p>
<p>Psychological symptoms, for example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▢ depression</li> <li>▢ anxiety</li> <li>▢ panic attacks</li> <li>▢ mood changes</li> <li>▢ loss of confidence</li> </ul>	<p>Excessive workloads, unsupportive management and colleagues, perceived stigma around the menopause, bullying and harassment and any form of work-related stress may exacerbate symptoms</p> <p>Stress can have wide-ranging negative effects on mental and physical health and wellbeing</p> <p>Performance and workplace relationships may be affected</p>	<p>Ensure staff are not penalised or suffer detriment if they require adjustments to workload, tasks or performance management targets</p> <p>Ensure managers understand the menopause and are prepared to discuss any concerns that a staff member may have in a supportive manner</p> <p>Ensure managers have a positive attitude and understand they should offer adjustments to workload and tasks if needed</p> <p>Allow flexible / home / agile working</p> <p>Make allowance for potential additional need for sickness absence</p> <p>Ensure staff are trained in Mental Health awareness</p> <p>Raise general awareness of issues around the menopause so colleagues are more likely to be supportive</p> <p>Provide opportunities to network with colleagues experiencing similar issues</p> <p>Ensure a quiet area/room is available Provide access to counselling services</p>
<p>Psychological symptoms;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▢ memory problems</li> <li>▢ difficulty concentrating</li> </ul>	<p>Certain tasks may become more difficult to carry out temporarily; for example-</p> <p>learning new skills (may be compounded by lack of sleep and fatigue);</p> <p>performance may be affected;</p>	<p>Carry out a stress risk assessment and wherever possible address any work-related concerns</p> <p>Reassure staff member they will not be penalised or suffer detriment if they require</p>

	<p>work related stress may exacerbate these symptoms from which loss of confidence may result</p>	<p>adjustments to their workload or performance management targets</p> <p>Ensure managers understand the menopause and are prepared to discuss any concerns that staff may have in a supportive manner</p> <p>Ensure managers have a positive attitude and understand they should offer adjustments to workload and tasks if needed</p> <p>Reduce demands if workload identified as an issue</p> <p>Provide additional time to complete tasks if needed, or consider substituting with alternate tasks</p> <p>Allow flexible / home / agile working</p>
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Discuss whether the member of staff has visited their GP. Depending on the discussion this may be the next step to suggest, particularly if the areas of difficulty are sleeping, panic attacks or anxiety.

If they have visited their GP and are being supported by them it may be helpful at this point to make an Occupational Health referral to seek specific advice on how best they can be supported in the workplace.

## Appendix 3 Confidential Colleague discussion – template

### Member of staff details

Name		Job title	
Department / Division		Location	

### Attendees at meeting (names & job titles)

Date of discussion	

### Summary of discussion

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### Agreed Actions / Adjustments

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<b>Date of next review meeting</b>	
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<b>Signed (member of staff)</b>	
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<b>Date</b>	
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<b>Signed (manager)</b>	
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<b>Date</b>	
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## Appendix 4: Menopause Advice Sheet – How to talk to your GP

If you are suffering from menopausal symptoms to the point they are getting in the way of you enjoying life, it could be time to talk to your doctor.

Talking about menopausal symptoms can be hard let alone if you feel rushed or unprepared so hopefully there are some helpful, straightforward tips below to help you get the best from your appointment.

- ♣ Don't wait. It is all too common for women to feel they must simply "put up" with menopausal symptoms as a part of life, but if they are affecting you there are things you can do, and support is available. There is no need to wait until symptoms feel unbearable.
- ♣ Read the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines which are what a GP will often use to determine the type of conversation to have with you and treatments to offer. There are guidelines for patients which are really useful to read before you see your GP, so you know what to expect.
- ♣ Prepare for your appointment. It's easier for your GP to understand what's going on if you provide them with all the information. This may sound obvious but blood tests to say where you are on the menopause transition aren't always available or accurate – your hormones can fluctuate daily during this time. So, your GP will be thinking about what to recommend for you, based on your symptoms.
- ♣ Keep a list of your symptoms, including your menstrual cycle, hot flushes, how you're feeling and any changes you've noticed. Write them down and take them to your appointment. This should help you and your GP find a solution faster. And, if you have any preferences about how you manage your symptoms advise the GP; for example, if you'd like to try hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or not.
- ♣ Ask the receptionist which doctor is best to talk to about menopause. This may not be your usual GP but someone who has had special training on the subject. If you don't think the standard appointment time will be long enough, try to book a double appointment as some surgeries will provide this option.
- ♣ Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion. If you don't feel you've received the help you need, ask to speak to someone else. You know how you're feeling and how you are being affected.
- ♣ Ask if there is a menopause clinic in your area. Occasionally there are regional clinics specifically devoted to menopause. If there is one in your area and you think it would be helpful, ask for a referral.
- ♣ Take your partner or a friend with you. Chances are you spend your life supporting others and during menopause it's your turn to ask them for support. Your partner or friend will know how symptoms are affecting you so they could support you at your appointment and also find out how best they can continue supporting you



## What to expect from your GP?

There are certain things your GP should and should not do during your appointment.

They should:

- ♣ Talk to you about your lifestyle and how to manage both your symptoms and your longer-term health
- ♣ Offer advice on hormone replacement therapy and other non-medical options
- ♣ Talk to you about the safety and effectiveness of any treatment

They should not:

- ♣ Tell you that it's just that time of life
- ♣ Tell you they don't prescribe HRT. It's up to you what you want to try and for them to say whether it could be right for you, depending on your medical history
- ♣ Impose unnecessary time restrictions, such as they will only prescribe this once, or for a year or two. This is an ongoing conversation and if your symptoms persist you will still need help to manage them

Remember your 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. Don't think you have to struggle through menopause when there is help and support available.

## Appendix 5 Sources of help and external links

All ICB staff can access Validium, CWICB's Employee Assistance Programme:

Username: CCG

Password: eap4support

Phone: 0141 271 7190 (Temp No.)

National Health Service – provides an overview of the menopause and available treatments. Find out more at;

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause>

NHS Employers – Information on how menopause can affect people at work, and practical guidance for employers on how to improve workplace environments for them;

<https://www.nhsemployers.org/articles/menopause-and-workplace>

British Menopause Society – have developed a series of short videos covering some of the key topics in menopause care by leading specialists in their field

<https://thebms.org.uk/publications/videos/bms-tv>

Women's Health Concern (WHC) – the patient arm of the British Menopause Society. They provide an independent service to advise, reassure and educate women of all ages about their gynaecological and sexual health, wellbeing and lifestyle concerns;

<https://www.womens-health-concern.org>

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists – offer information in a dedicated area of their website at;

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/menopause>

Daisy Network – offers information and support on Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI), very early menopause;

<https://www.daisynetwork.org>

ACAS – provide information on managing the effects of the menopause (useful information for managers and affected staff);

<https://www.acas.org.uk/menopause-at-work>

Menopause Matters – this website provides up-to-date, accurate information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options;

<https://www.menopausematters.co.uk>

Rock My Menopause – created by the Primary Care Women's Health Forum (PCWHF), a group of 10,000 healthcare professionals with a special interest in women's health. This website aims to raise menopause awareness, debunk myths and provides useful resources in the form of factsheets, podcasts and videos

<https://rockmymenopause.com/>