

# UCD Policy on Supporting Employees on their Menopause (including Perimenopause) Journey



**Policy owner** EDI

**Approval date and body** UMT 28 February 2023

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## 1. Purpose

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for all employees and to foster an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably instigate conversations or engage in discussions about the menopause. The changing age of Ireland's workforce means that there are many menopausal employees in the workplace. Research has shown that 60% of women will have moderate to severe symptoms, with 30% being severe. Irish data indicates that 45% of menopausal women have considered giving up work and 12% actually gave up work. It is generally accepted that the menopause affects people between 45 and 60 years of age, however it can occur much earlier for some and perimenopausal symptoms can be felt from up to 6 years prior to the onset of menopause so there are wide variations in age. UCD wants to ensure that employees do not have to hide major aspects of their life experience due to the challenges they face going through the menopause.

Many employees may be unwilling to discuss menopause-related health problems with their manager or ask for the support or adjustments that they may need. For employees experiencing symptoms, it can be a difficult and stressful time as well as a very sensitive and personal matter. For the employer, it is an employee health and wellbeing concern. This policy sets out the commitments of the University to employees and managers on providing the right support to manage menopausal symptoms at work.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to all employees and particularly those experiencing the menopause. Trans men, trans women and non-binary people may also experience the menopause. Not all women will experience debilitating menopause symptoms. It is recognised that the menopause can also directly and indirectly affect others both within the workplace and at home so this policy is not just for employees that experience the physical and psychological symptoms of menopause, it's also for people managers and colleagues.

## 3. Definitions

**Menopause** – Menopause is part of the natural ageing process. It refers to the time when menstruation has ceased for 12 consecutive months. It is triggered by lower levels of oestrogen, which decrease naturally between the ages of 45 and 55. Whilst it is a natural process, it can brought

on earlier by certain things e.g. chemotherapy, hysterectomy. The menopause can cause a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms that can last for several years. The majority of menopausal women experience symptoms, but everyone is different and symptoms can fluctuate and be felt to varying degrees. Experiencing any of the typical symptoms can pose a challenge for women as they go about their daily lives, including at work. There are 40+ symptoms of menopause, some of the most typical symptoms of the menopause include:

- psychological issues such as mood disturbances, anxiety and/or depression, memory loss, panic attacks, loss of confidence and reduced concentration
- hot flushes (brief and sudden surges of heat usually felt in the face, neck and chest)
- sleep disturbance that can make people feel tired and irritable
- night sweats (hot flushes that happen during the night)
- irregular periods and/or periods can become light or heavy
- muscle and joint stiffness, aches and pains
- recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs) including cystitis
- headaches
- weight gain
- palpitations (heartbeats that become more noticeable)
- skin changes (dryness, acne, general itchiness)
- reduced sex drive

On average the menopause lasts 7.4 years. Some people go through menopause with little impact on their daily life. However, others experience symptoms that can last for several years and have an impact on their performance and attendance at work.

**Perimenopause** – the time leading up to the end of your periods when changes start to happen. This typically starts in the age groups of late 30s to early 40s.

**Post-menopause** – this is a biological stage of life when a woman has not had a period for over 12 consecutive months

**Premature menopause** – this occurs before the age of 40 (also known as POI - premature ovarian insufficiency) which may be brought on because of illness or surgery

**Surgical menopause** - follows the removal of one or both ovaries or radiation of the pelvis.

For the purpose of this policy, the term Menopause throughout the document will include perimenopause, premature menopause and surgical menopause.

## 4. Principles

The University recognises it has an important role in supporting employees during this stage of life and that at times it can be a challenging transition. The following are the key principles of this policy:

- To foster an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably initiate conversations or engage in discussions about menopause without embarrassment and to lift any stigma associated with the menopause.
- To raise awareness of menopause related issues at work and enable women to attend work and contribute their best whilst experiencing menopausal symptoms through the provision

of supports and reasonable adjustments to the working environment and working patterns where it is possible to do.

- To ensure that women's careers are not impacted.
- To educate and inform managers about the potential symptoms of menopause and how they can support work colleagues.
- To ensure the needs of colleagues experiencing menopause are taken into account and know where to access supports and resources.
- That any discussions that take place are treated sensitively and confidentially and not disclosed without the express permission of the employee.
- Supporting employees experiencing menopausal symptoms in the same way as an employee with any ongoing health complaint.

## **5. Roles and responsibilities**

Those experiencing the menopause develop many strategies themselves for coping with problematic menopausal symptoms at work, but the success of these depend on well-informed, supportive managers and colleagues.

UMT are responsible for:

- Creating an inclusive and healthy culture where conversations about the menopause can occur and which allows people experiencing menopause to feel supported and valued in the workplace.
- Supporting and encouraging people managers to be equipped with the knowledge and awareness they need to have to support employees experiencing the menopause.
- Enabling the provision of accommodations and supports that are helpful to managing symptoms.
- Ensuring relevant policies include reference to the menopause.
- Championing and raising awareness of the impact of the menopause on those experiencing it.

People managers are responsible for:

- Familiarising themselves with the Menopause Policy and Guidance Materials and attend any relevant training/awareness raising sessions.
- Being ready and willing to have open discussions about the menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation and treating it sensitively and professionally.
- Considering, with the employee, how best they can be supported including any requests to accommodate changes at work that may be helpful to manage symptoms.
- Implementing Occupational Health advice and any recommendations where reasonably practicable (in instances when an employee is referred to Occupational Health).
- Ensuring that agreed actions are implemented and ongoing dialogue occurs.
- Creating an inclusive and healthy culture where conversations about the menopause can occur and which allows people experiencing menopause to feel supported and valued in the workplace and colleagues to understand the menopause journey that colleagues may be on.

Employees are responsible for:

- Taking personal responsibility for their health and wellbeing seeking medical advice if necessary.
- Think about what adjustments/changes to the role would help alleviate the symptoms and discussing this with their manager or other appropriate person.
- Familiarising themselves with the guidance and information provided.
- Being open in conversations with managers/HR and Occupational Health and keeping their manager informed of any changes to their health that impacts on their workplace duties and responsibilities.
- Being willing to support colleagues and understand any changes at work which have been agreed to support their colleagues as a result of menopausal symptoms.
- Complying with all the University policies and procedures relating to equality and diversity, ensuring that individuals are treated with respect and dignity and are not subjected to ageist or sexist comments when experiencing symptoms of the menopause.

Human Resources are responsible for:

- Offering guidance to people managers on the interpretation of this policy.
- Providing guidance to employees who have approached HR directly in relation to the supports available.
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this guidance in respect of related absence levels and performance.
- Make referrals to occupational health as required.
- Signpost to supports such as the Employee Assistance Service.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion are responsible for:

- Continuing to support the discussion around the menopause through a variety of measures.
- Helping managers and employees to have a greater understanding of the menopause so that they can support those on their menopause journey.
- Supporting the implementation of this policy and keeping it updated to ensure it remains in line with good practice and the UCD EDI principles.
- Measuring the impact of initiatives through regular engagement with employees and managers.

## **6. Related Documents/Resources**

- Guidelines for Managers
- Guidelines for Employees
- Women Health – National initiatives
- UCD Gender Equality Action Plan 2020 - 2024

## 7. Version History

Version	Date	Description	Author
1.0	February 2023	Development of new policy	Working Group, UCD EDI