

THORNBURY TOWN COUNCIL



Menopause Policy

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2. PURPOSE

Thornbury Town Council is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for everyone who works here and so, for the purposes of this policy, gender neutral pronouns will be used. Thornbury Town Council recognises that not every person going through the menopause will identify as 'female' and this policy is inclusive of all gender identities including trans and non-binary.

Menopause is a natural part of life for some, and it isn't always an easy transition. With the right support, it can be much better. Whilst every person does not suffer with symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work. Menopause should not be taboo or 'hidden'.

The council wants everyone to understand what menopause is, and to be able to talk about it openly, without embarrassment. The council considers this issue is not just for those suffering from menopausal symptoms, everyone should be familiar with it.

The changing age of the UK's workforce means that between 75% and 80% of people experiencing menopause are in work. Research shows that the majority are unwilling to discuss menopause related health problems with their line manager, or to ask for the support or adjustments that they might need.

This policy sets out the guidelines for member of staff and councillors on providing the right support to manage menopausal symptoms at work. It is not contractual and does not form part of the terms and conditions of employment.

3. SCOPE OF THE POLICY

This policy applies to all Thornbury Town Council staff (including volunteers) and councillors. The policy applies to all stages of the menopause: perimenopause, menopause and post menopause.

4. AIMS OF THIS POLICY

The aims of this policy are to:

- Foster an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably instigate conversations or engage in discussions about menopause.
- Ensure everyone understands what menopause is, can confidently have good conversations, and are clear on the town council's policy and practices.
- Educate and inform staff and councillors about the potential symptoms of menopause and suggest how they can support their colleagues, who may be experiencing symptoms, at work.
- Ensure that colleagues suffering with menopausal symptoms feel confident to discuss it, ask for support and ask for any reasonable adjustments that allow them to continue to be successful in their roles.

- Reduce absenteeism due to menopausal symptoms.
- Assure staff that the town council is a responsible employer, committed to supporting their needs during menopause.

5. DEFINITIONS

Menopause is defined as a biological stage in a person's life that occurs when they stop menstruating and reach the end of their natural reproductive life. Usually, it is defined as having occurred when someone has not had a period for twelve consecutive months (for people reaching menopause naturally). The average age for a person to reach menopause is 51, however, it can be earlier or later than this.

Perimenopause is the time leading up to menopause when a person may experience changes, such as irregular periods or other menopausal symptoms. This can be years before menopause.

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

6. SYMPTOMS OF MENOPAUSE

It is important to note that not every person will notice every symptom, or even need help or support. However, 75% of people do experience some symptoms, and 25% could be classed as severe. Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically including, but not exclusively, hot flushes, poor concentration, headaches, panic attacks, heavy/light periods, anxiety, and loss of confidence. Some people also experience difficulty sleeping.

7. POLICY GUIDANCE

Thornbury Town Council has used guidance from the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM), and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), to inform this policy. The NICE guidelines set out the recommendations for medical professionals when treating menopausal symptoms.

Self-management, with support from managers and colleagues, will help to manage symptoms. Appendix A details some recommendations to support symptomatic people, and others, who might just need advice and support. Appendix 1 is a template to assist managers and/or councillors in recording conversations with members of staff and noting agreed actions and adjustments.

In accordance with FOM and NICE guidelines, symptomatic people should be advised to seek medical advice from the GP in the first instance. Appendix B offers a helpful guide giving advice on how to have constructive conversations about menopause with a doctor.

8. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Members of staff are responsible for:

- Taking personal responsibility to look after their health.
- Speaking to their line manager, or if their line manager is not supporting them, they can speak directly to the town clerk or a member of the Staffing Committee.
- Being open and honest in conversations with managers/staffing committee.
- Contributing to a respectful and productive working environment.
- Being willing to help and support their colleagues.
- Understanding any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.

Line managers (see Appendix 1 for Managers' Guidance) will:

- Familiarise themselves with the Menopause Policy and Guidance.
- Be ready and willing to have open discussions about menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and professionally.
- Use the guidance in Appendices A and B, signposting and reviewing together, before agreeing with the individual how best they can be supported, and any adjustments required.
- Record adjustments agreed, and actions to be implemented.
- Ensure ongoing dialogue and review dates.
- Ensure that adjustments are adhered to.

Where adjustments are unsuccessful, or if symptoms are proving more problematic, the line manager may:

- Discuss with the staff member a referral to Occupational Health for further advice, with the assistance and guidance of the town clerk.
- Review Occupational Health advice, and implement any recommendations, where reasonably practical.
- Update any action plan and continue to review.

The role of Occupational Health is to:

- Carry out a holistic assessment of individuals as to whether or not menopause may be contributing to symptoms/wellbeing, providing advice and guidance in line with up-to-date research.
- Signpost to appropriate sources of help and advice (refer to Appendix B for more information).
- Provide support and advice to the managers in identifying reasonable adjustments, if required.

The Town Clerk and the Staff Committee will:

- Offer guidance to managers on the interpretation of this Policy and Guidance.
- Undertake training and provide updates that affect this policy.
- Consider relevant applications for work adjustments made under this policy.

- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this policy in respect of related absence levels and performance.
- Remind councillors of the Nolan Principles, including “Leadership”: Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs. ([The Seven Principles of Public Life - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk))

Appendix A Managers' Guidance for colleague discussions

The council recognises that everyone is different, and it is therefore not feasible to set out a structured set of specific guidelines. All advice is given, and written, in accordance with the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) recommendations and best practice. If an employee wishes to speak about their symptoms, or just to talk about how they are feeling (they may not recognise themselves that they are symptomatic), or if they wish to speak about a family member, please ensure that you:

- Allow adequate time to have the conversation,
- Find an appropriate room to preserve confidentiality,
- Encourage them to speak openly and honestly,
- Suggest ways in which they can be supported (see symptoms below) – hand out the Menopause advice sheet (Appendix B),
- Agree actions, and how to implement them (you should use template at Appendix A.1 to record the meeting, so that all parties agree what has been discussed, and the next steps, before the meeting ends). Ensure that this record is treated as confidential and is stored securely.
- Agree if other members of the team should be informed, and by whom,
- Ensure that designated time is allowed for a follow up meeting. Do not rely on quick queries during chance encounters in the corridor or office.

Symptom Support

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically, including, but not exhaustively those listed below. Support for individuals should be considered as detailed below:

Hot flushes

- Request temperature control for their work area, such as a fan on their desk, or moving away from a heat source.
- Ensure storage space is available for a change of clothing.
- Permit staff to work from home for a time, where possible.

Headaches

- Have ease of access to drinking water.
- Offer a quiet place to work.
- Offer noise-reducing headphones to wear in open spaces.
- Have time out to take medication if needed.

Difficulty Sleeping

- Consider flexible working, particularly if suffering from lack of sleep.

Low Mood

- Agree time out from others, when required, without needing to ask for permission.
- Identify a 'buddy' for the colleague to talk to (outside of the work area if possible).
- Identify a 'time out space' to be able to go to 'clear their head'.

- Permit staff to work from home for a time, where possible, ensuring they do not become isolated.

Loss of Confidence

- Ensure there are regular Personal Development discussions.
- Have regular protected time with their manager to discuss any issues.
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.

Poor Concentration

- Discuss if there are times of the day when concentration is better or worse and adjust working pattern/practice accordingly.
- Review task allocation and workload.
- Provide books for lists, action boards, or other memory assisting equipment.
- Offer a quiet space to work.
- Offer noise reducing headphones to wear in open offices.
- Reduce interruptions, where possible.
- Have agreements in place in an open office that an individual is having 'protected time', so that they are not disturbed.
- Have agreed protected time to catch up with work.

Anxiety

- Promote the DAS – 24-hour counselling helpline service, available to employees and their immediate families, on 0117 934 2121.
- Identify a 'buddy' for the colleague to talk to (outside of their work area if possible).
- Be able to have time away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques.
- Encourage and allow reasonable time for mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk.

Panic Attacks

- Promote the DAS – 24-hour counselling helpline service, available to employees and their immediate families, on 0117 934 2121.
- Agree time out from others, when required, without needing to ask for permission.
- Identify a 'buddy' outside of the work area.
- Be able to have time away from their work to undertake relaxation techniques.
- Encourage and allow mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk.

Discuss whether the member of staff has visited the GP. Depending on the discussion, this may be the next step suggested, 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 give specific advice regarding the workplace.

Appendix A.1 Confidential Colleague Discussion – Template

Member of staff's details

Name:

Job Title:

Location:

Names of those present at meeting:

Date of discussion:

Summary of discussion:

Agreed actions/adjustments:

Date of next review meeting:

Signed (member of staff):

Signed (manager):

Appendix B Menopause Advice Sheet – How to talk to your GP about menopause

If you're suffering from menopausal symptoms to the point they're getting in the way of your work and enjoying life, it's time to talk to your doctor. However, sometimes, that is easier said than done.

We all know how difficult it can often be just to get an appointment, and then it's often only for 10 minutes. Talking about symptoms can be hard, let alone if you feel rushed or unprepared. So, what can you do? We've put together some helpful, straightforward tips to help you get the best from your appointment.

Don't wait. It is all too common to feel like you 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 available. There is no need to wait until symptoms feel unbearable. Read the NICE guidelines. This stands for National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and these guidelines are what your doctor will use to determine the type of conversations 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 doctor to understand what's going on if you provide them with all the information. That 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 doctor will be thinking about what to recommend for you, based on your symptoms.

Keep a list of your symptoms, your menstrual cycle, hot flushes, how you're feeling and any changes you've noticed. Write them down and take them to your appointment. Your doctor will thank you for it, and it's more likely that together, you'll find the right solution faster. If you have any preferences about how you manage your symptoms, tell them that too – 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. They are often the font of all knowledge at a surgery and can help you to find the best person to speak to – it might not be your usual GP, it could be someone who has had special training in the subject. Ask for a longer appointment. If you don't think your standard appointment will be long enough, try to book a double appointment, as some surgeries do offer this.

Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion. If you don't feel that you have received the help that you need, ask to speak to someone else. Don't be put off, you know how you are feeling and how it is affecting you.

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 that it would be helpful to you, ask for a referral.

Take a partner or friend with you. The chances are, you spend your life supporting others and, during menopause, it may be your turn to ask for support. Your partner or a friend will

know how the symptoms are affecting you. They could support you at the appointment and find out how to continue to support you.

What to expect from your doctor

There are certain things a 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 after the safety and effectiveness of any treatment

They should not:

- Tell you that it is just that time of your life. Yes, menopause is a natural stage, but please don't feel that means you should have to put up with every symptom without help.
- Tell you that 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.