



## **MENOPAUSE FACTSHEET**

### **What is the menopause?**

The menopause typically occurs in women between the ages of 40 and 55 and is usually a natural part of the aging process. It marks the end of the reproductive period and menstruation. In some cases however, it can begin earlier, often as a result of a family history of early or premature menopause, or start suddenly due to medical treatments or surgical interventions such as chemotherapy or a hysterectomy.

It is caused by hormonal changes and can on average last from four to eight years.

Physical symptoms associated with the menopause can include hot flushes, fatigue, sleep disturbance and dry skin. Psychological symptoms can include mood disturbances, anxiety and depression, poor concentration or memory amongst many others.

### **What is the impact of the menopause on workers?**

GMB workplace surveys about the menopause inform us that many members find the symptoms of the menopause have a serious impact at work. For example, members report that lack of sleep and feeling “foggy” have an impact on carrying out tasks at work that normally they would have no problem with. In some cases, these issues can lead to employers pursuing capability or disciplinary procedures.

Members also report cultural barriers such as inappropriate jokes and stigma at work preventing them from speaking to their employer about this impact. Many members have been unable to be open and honest with their line manager about how the menopause is impacting them because of a lack of confidentiality.

Some employers are starting to recognise the impact of the menopause on women workers; however, most workplaces still do not provide any inclusive policy or practical support for workers including younger women, trans men, non-binary or intersex workers who may also experience the menopause.

## Why is this a workplace issue?

Members tell us that this can have a profound impact on their working lives, but too often there is very little support and they may feel reluctant to come forward due to stigma.

Menopause can have a wide variety of impacts on people at work from synthetic non-breathable uniforms making hot flushes and sweating much worse, to really damaging workers professional confidence as their memory and concentration is impacted.

In the last few years, we have seen a rise in both the awareness of the menopause as a workplace issue and the number of workers affected due to more older women in the workplace.

From a union perspective tackling issues on the menopause in the workplace is about eliminating discrimination but also creating a culture change that benefits all workers and creates a safer and more inclusive workplace.

## What are GMB campaigning for?

GMB believe that all workplaces should be inclusive for workers experiencing the menopause.

This includes:

- a workplace menopause policy covering all workers experiencing the menopause including training for managers

Reasonable adjustments including:

- Access to drinking water
- Access to fan/ air con/or to work near a window
- Changes to, or extra uniform where needed
- Flexible working, including homeworking – where this is appropriate
- Changes to shift patterns or hours where needed
- Toilet breaks as needed
- Any menopause related sickness to be removed from capabilities process

Interested in finding out more about how you can get involved in the GMB's campaign for more inclusive workplaces? [Speak to your rep or branch secretary.](#)

For more information including our model menopause policy go to our website: [www.gmb.org.uk/smash-the-stigma](http://www.gmb.org.uk/smash-the-stigma)

**“I have had a long and successful career with South East Coast Ambulance service as a paramedic.**

**At the age of 54 I was suffering Menopausal symptoms that were inhibiting my ability to work shifts on an Ambulance and in particular night shifts, as the disruption of my sleep pattern increased my physical symptoms, requiring myself to need station facilities more than what was practical during the shift.**

**I genuinely thought my career was over and all that came with it.**

**My Union rep and manager informed me of SECamb's new menopause policy, which would navigate me to some reasonable adjustments.**

**This was achieved and has seen a reduction of my nights to a more even spread of daytime and twilight shifts.**

**This arrangement is constantly under review with the support of this policy and I now feel confident and empowered to continue my career on the journey I always envisaged”.**

**GMB MEMBER, SECAMB EMPLOYEE, PARAMEDIC**

