



What is Menopause?

Menopause marks the end of one's menstrual cycle. Someone is typically considered menopausal when they naturally stop having menstrual periods. On average in the U.S., this happens at the age of 51.ⁱ Although menopause is usually caused by a natural decline in reproductive hormones, it can also happen for other reasons such as chemotherapy and radiation to treat cancer or after an oophorectomy, ovary removal surgery.ⁱⁱ Symptoms of perimenopause, the period before menopause, can begin four to 10 years before menopause. During perimenopause, one can still become pregnant, but fertility tends to be lower, and periods are not as predictable.ⁱⁱⁱ

Not everyone who experiences menopause and perimenopause will experience symptoms, and research indicates that there may be dozens of menopause symptoms. Well-known symptoms include hot flashes and chills, problems sleeping, thinning hair, and drier skin. One percent of women experience menopause before the age of 40, and some evidence suggests that women of color in the U.S. may experience symptoms of menopause earlier than the average age.^{iv} Treatment for menopause symptoms may include hormone therapy in consultation with a doctor.^v Transgender individuals and others who use gender-affirming hormone therapy may avoid menopause entirely as a result.^{vi}

Gender Equity at Work

People who experience the "3 Ms" (menstruation, maternity, and menopause) often have to navigate workplaces that consider the masculine experience to be the default experience.^{vii} This can look like uniforms or office furniture designed for the average male body, or office thermostats set at a temperature that is more comfortable for men — who tend to have more muscle mass and whose bodies distribute heat differently — than for women. Due to menopause, people can face challenges and barriers at work related to their gender, age, and ability. People in perimenopause, menopause, and post-menopause may deal with issues or judgment not experienced by their non-menopausal colleagues. In fact, according to one survey, half of post-menopausal women believe that menopause is a taboo subject.^{viii}

Menopause in the Workplace

Menopausal women represent a quarter of the national workforce, and they are a fast-growing group. Each year, menopause could cost New York City women millions of dollars in lost work time.^{ix} A study in the U.K. revealed that one in four women considered leaving their job due to menopause symptoms, and about 15 percent of workers reported that their menopause symptoms caused them to miss work or reduce work hours.^x

Employers have an important role to play in helping menopausal and postmenopausal workers navigate this natural transition in their lives and fostering more gender-equitable work environments.^{xi}

What Can Employers Do?

Below are some examples of steps employers may take to better support employees experiencing menopause, though each employer may be subject to different constraints or terms:

- Ensure the existing process for applying for reasonable accommodations or time off is clear.



- Make items like desk fans available to employees who sit at computers.
- Provide free menstrual products in all restrooms, and ensure restrooms are near workspaces and available to employees throughout the day.
- Implement additional training for all employees, especially managers, to address the basic facts and symptoms of menopause and the importance of combatting discrimination, including sexism, ageism, and ableism.
- Update the office dress code to ensure employees feel that they can dress comfortably.
- Introduce a flexible schedule or a hybrid schedule for employees.
- Publicize programs that promote health and wellness as well as spaces where employees can share their experiences or learn from each other (for example, walks at lunchtime, cooking workshops, and employee resource groups).

Resources

Perimenopause and menopause symptoms can be alleviated by certain prescription medications and by hormone replacement therapy. Providers may also recommend lifestyle changes like decreasing or avoiding caffeine and alcohol intake, exercising, including strengthening pelvic floor muscles through Kegel exercises, eating a balanced diet, and refraining from smoking.^{xii} For more information, visit:

- <https://www.womenshealth.gov/menopause>
- <https://www.fda.gov/consumers/womens-health-topics/menopause>
- <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/what-menopause>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/womensrh/index.htm>
- <https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/the-menopause-years>
- <https://www.menopause.org/>

Conclusion

Menopause is a normal part of life for many people around the world. In some cultures, such as in Turkey, parts of China, and Japan, this stage is seen as a “second spring” or a season of renewal and regeneration.^{xiii} Having more transparent conversations and providing support and accommodations for people experiencing symptoms can help to reframe the way we think about menopause and reduce stigma and isolation. Employers can help to normalize and accommodate this stage of life and foster workplaces where people experiencing menopause feel valued and supported.

ⁱ <https://www.yalemedicine.org/conditions/menopause>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/menopause/symptoms-causes/syc-20353397>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/21608-perimenopause>

^{iv} <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/23/well/live/menopause-symptoms-women-of-color.html>

^v <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/treatments/15245-hormone-therapy-for-menopause-symptoms>

^{vi} <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37011669/>

^{vii} Grandey AA, Gabriel AS, King EB. Tackling taboo topics: A review of the three M s in working women’s lives. *J. Manag.* 2020, 46:7–35.

^{viii} <https://www.essity.com/company/breaking-barriers-to-well-being/events/world-menopause-day/menopause-study/>

^{ix} <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/28/well/live/menopause-symptoms-work-women.html?smid=url-share>

^x <https://menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk/articles/menopause-and-work-its-important/>

^{xi} <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carolinecastrillon/2023/03/22/why-its-time-to-address-menopause-in-the-workplace/>

^{xii} <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/menopause/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20353401>

^{xiii} <https://www.womenshealthnetwork.com/menopause-and-perimenopause/menopause-in-different-cultures/>