

# MENOPAUSE TOOLKIT



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**This is a toolkit for employers and employees looking to understand and support team members going through menopause.**

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# Navigating menopause in the workplace

Menopause is a natural stage of life affecting more than half of the workforce, yet it remains stigmatised. This stigma often prevents people from comfortably discussing their challenging symptoms with colleagues or management.

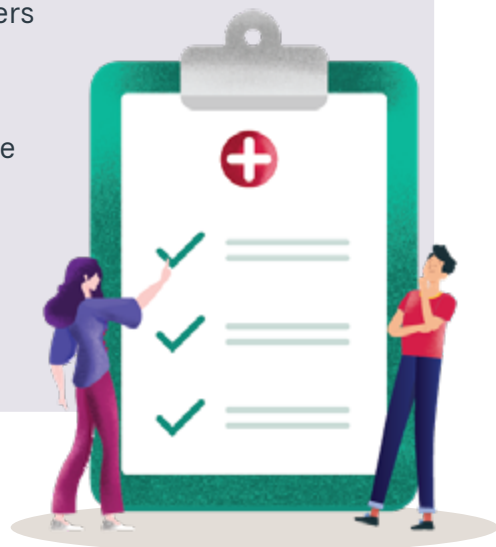
A recent study, spanning various organisations, has uncovered a notable connection; the more a person experiences menopause-related symptoms, the lower their engagement, job satisfaction, commitment to their organisation, and the higher their likelihood of contemplating leaving their job.

At AIA, we understand the importance of raising awareness about perimenopause and menopause and the role a supportive workplace plays in promoting healthy ageing.

Our aim is to provide you with the tools and resources needed to ensure your workplace effectively supports individuals navigating menopause.

## What can you gain from this toolkit

- A comprehensive understanding of menopause and its symptoms.
- Help identifying and addressing barriers faced by colleagues experiencing menopause.
- Confidence in your role as a supportive colleague for those with menopausal symptoms.
- Practical workplace adjustments to enhance employee wellbeing and help them thrive at work.



## What is Menopause?

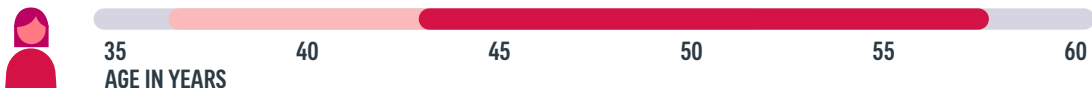
Menopause is a natural process experienced by the majority of women and some people who are transgender or non-binary.

Symptoms are experienced as oestrogen levels decline and periods cease. Rather than a singular event, menopausal symptoms typically span several years, making it best described as a transitional phase.

## When does it occur?

This biological transition typically occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 and can extend over several years. However, early menopause may occur before this timeframe.

Perimenopause is the phase leading up to menopause, where hormonal shifts begin. For a minority of people, perimenopause can start as early as their twenties, while others may experience it in their late forties.



This highlights the importance of not presuming whether someone is going through menopause. Instead, we need to foster an environment where people feel safe and encouraged to communicate their symptoms to colleagues or managers.

## What are the symptoms?

People navigating perimenopause and menopause may experience a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms. These may include:

- Hot flushes, sweating and chills
- Insomnia or sleep disturbance
- Irregular periods and/or heavy periods
- Anxiety, depression, panic attacks, and/or loss of confidence
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Mood disturbance and/or irritability
- Memory loss, brain fog and/or difficulty concentrating
- Muscle/joint aches and stiffness
- Skin changes – dryness, itchiness, sensitivity, and unusual sensations
- Overactive bladder
- Recurrent urinary tract infections including cystitis
- Heart palpitations

# Why support employees going through Menopause?



## Menopause impacts wellbeing

**60% of people going through menopause experience symptoms, with 20% facing severe symptoms.** These symptoms, and the stigma associated with them, can have a significant impact on wellbeing and can pose a challenge for people as they go about their daily lives. For example, people may feel less confident and at odds with their desired image, in both their personal and professional lives.

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## Menopause impacts work

In 2021, a study by Circle In and The Victoria Women's Trust<sup>1</sup> found that 83% of menopausal women face work challenges, but only 70% feel comfortable discussing them with managers. These challenges can lead to early retirement, with 27% of Australian women retiring before the age of 55, having 40% less superannuation than men.

**Supporting menopausal employees results in reduced absences, lower employee turnover, and increased employee engagement.**

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## Menopause impacts a large proportion of our workforce

The average age of menopause in Australia is 51, although it may occur earlier, and women over 50 represent the fastest growing segment of the workforce.

**It is imperative that we create a positive working experience for this significant employee group.**

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## It's the right thing to do

As life expectancy increases, people are working for a significant period of life post-menopause.

**Adequately supporting employees experiencing menopause fosters a multi-generational and gender- diverse workforce where everyone can thrive.**

<sup>1</sup> "Report: Menopause and the Workplace | Insights." 2021. Circle In. March 30, 2021. <https://circlein.com/report-menopause-and-the-workplace/>.

# How to support employees going through menopause?

While menopause affects people differently, there are practical measures we can implement to support those experiencing it in the workplace and alleviate common symptoms. The following are a few options that can help.



## Understand the impact of symptoms:

Acknowledge that symptoms such as poor sleep, headaches, and brain fog can affect performance.



## Flexible work solutions:

- Consider permitting employees to start work an hour or two later, whenever necessary.
- Offer the option to work from home for those struggling with a noisy, distracting, or overwhelming work environment due to symptoms.
- Give employees the option to attend meetings virtually to allow them greater comfort when they're experiencing symptoms like hot flashes.



## Promote open dialogue:

Encourage openness and honesty regarding menopause and facilitate discussions among colleagues to identify necessary adjustments to support their work.



## Considerate communication:

- Caution against making jokes about menopause, as it can be counterproductive.
- Recognise that some people may use self-deprecating humour as a coping mechanism for their symptoms, but humour from others may not be helpful.



## What's your role as a colleague?

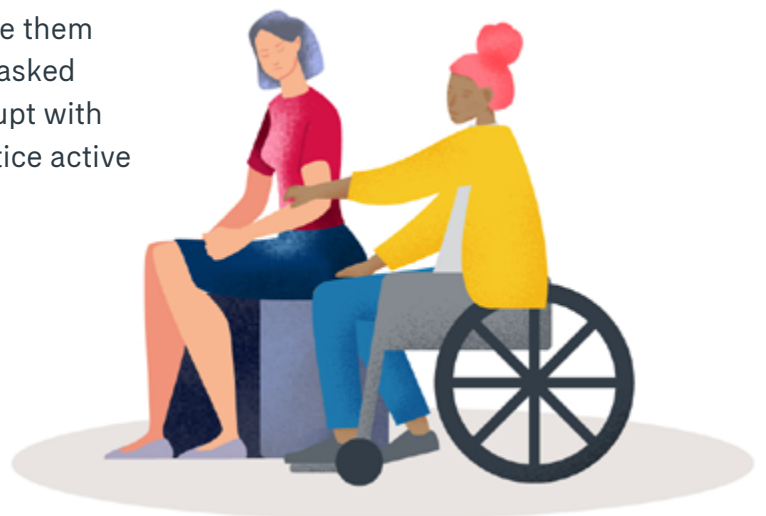
Enabling colleagues experiencing menopausal symptoms to be their best at work, by communicating openly and providing the right support, empowers all people – and all teams – to flourish and perform at their best.

Having awareness about menopause will enable you to support colleagues with menopausal symptoms, giving you an opportunity to improve your relationships with team members and contribute to a positive team morale.

Understanding the practical adjustments and support measures available will be helpful if a colleague reaches out to you for help or guidance.

### One of my team mates has opened up to me. What should I say?

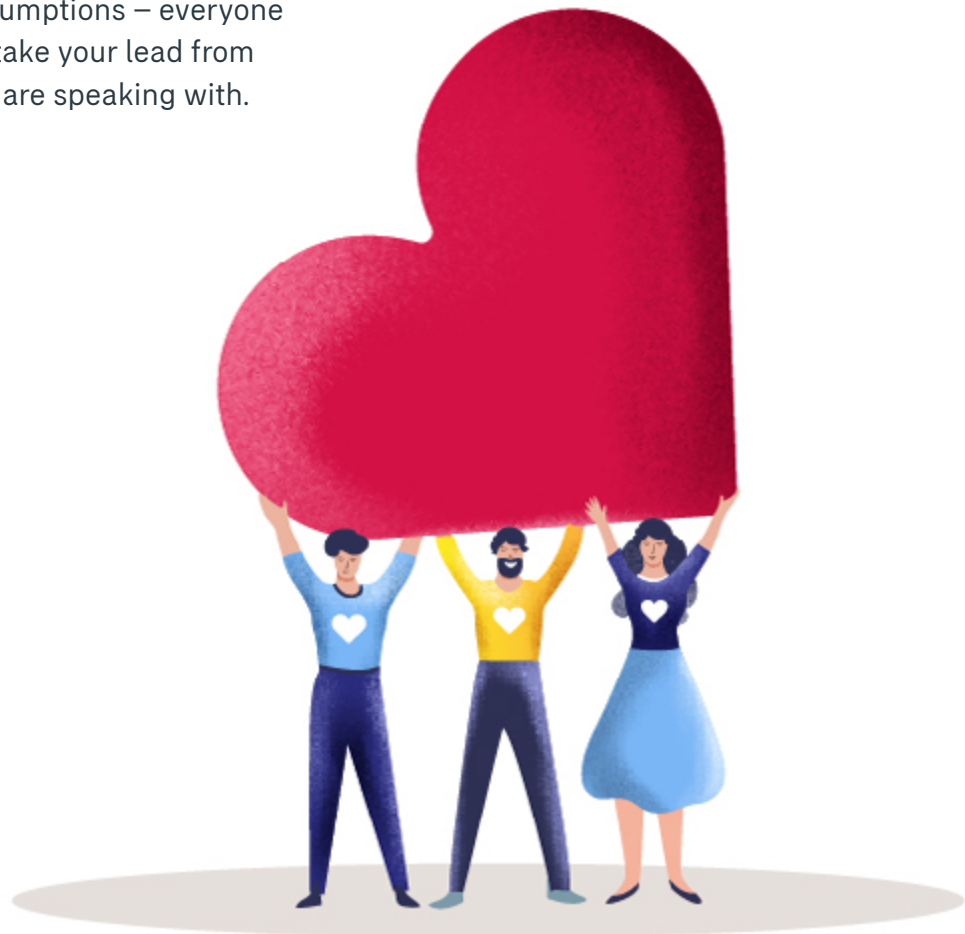
- ✓ **Don't feel like you have to have the perfect thing to say.** Simply offering your support and understanding can be one of the most helpful things you can do as a colleague.
- ✓ **Ask your teammate, "Are you OK?" and "How can I support you?"** Let them know that you are there to help them in any way that you can.
- ✓ **Be prepared to listen** and give them time to think when you have asked them a question. Don't interrupt with your own thoughts, and practice active listening.
- ✓ **Avoid making assumptions or generalisations** – menopause is deeply personal, and everyone's experience of it will be different.
- ✓ **Encourage them to speak with their manager** for further support.



## How can I contribute to an inclusive work environment?

Simple changes to how you interact with your teammates when they are experiencing menopausal symptoms, or any health changes or challenges for that matter, can make a world of difference:

- Building relationships based on trust, empathy, and respect will make it easier for a colleague to feel comfortable about raising a health issue like menopause.
- Asking teammates how they are on a regular basis will help create an open and inclusive culture, and give them the opportunity to raise any concerns.
- Don't make assumptions – everyone is different, so take your lead from the person you are speaking with.
- If you're going through or have personally experienced menopause, the most effective way to contribute to destigmatising it, is for you to share your own experience, if you're comfortable doing so.





# Resources

[Lifeline 13 11 14](#)

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[Australasian Menopause Society \(AMS\)](#)

[Fact sheets](#)

[Infographics](#)

[Find an AMS doctor in Australia](#)

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[Australian Government](#)

[National Women's Health Strategy 2020 to 2030](#)

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[The Controversial History of Hormone Replacement Therapy](#)

[It's Time to Start Talking About Menopause at Work](#)

[Navigating menopause together: How partners can help](#)



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