

# MENOPAUSE AT AIA NZ

## Who is this toolkit for?

A toolkit for those looking to understand and support colleagues going through menopause.

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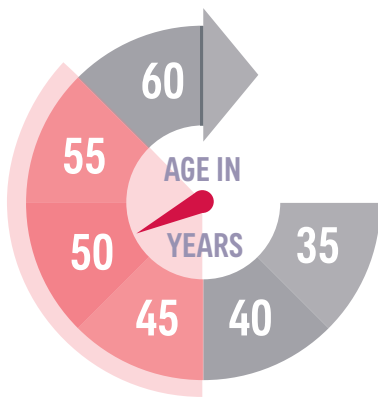
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# WHAT IS MENOPAUSE?

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. As menopausal symptoms are typically experienced for several years, it is best described as a 'transition' rather than a one-off event.



## When does it occur?

This biological transition typically occurs between age 45 and 55 and can last several years. However, some people may experience early menopause before this.

Peri-menopause is the phase leading up to menopause, when a woman's hormone balance starts to change. For some women this can start as early as their thirties, or as late as their late forties.

This means it's **important not to make assumptions** about whether or not someone may be going through menopause. Instead, we need to foster an environment where people are safe to speak up and disclose their symptoms to their leader or colleagues.

## What are the symptoms?

People who are going through peri-menopause 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
- Over-active bladder
- Recurrent urinary tract infections including cystitis
- Heart palpitations

Each person's experience is personal and symptoms will vary in duration, severity and impact.

# MENOPAUSE IN THE WORKPLACE

Menopause is a natural stage of life experienced by over 50% of the workforce, yet it remains stigmatised. This means that many people do not feel comfortable to disclose their symptoms, which can be severe, to colleagues or their leader.

A recent study<sup>1</sup> of employees with menopausal symptoms across a range of organisations found that, the more frequently they experienced menopause-related symptoms:

1. the less engaged they felt at work,
2. the less satisfied they were with their job,
3. the less committed they felt to the organisation they worked for,
4. and the greater intention they had to quit their job.

## At AIA NZ we recognise our responsibility to:

- Raise awareness and end stigma in order to foster an inclusive workplace where people are psychologically safe to speak up and discuss their menopause symptoms and experience.
- Provide support and workplace adjustments to ensure we have a workplace that is set up to best support people who are going through menopause.

## What to expect from this toolkit

- Understand the menopause transition and the symptoms it can include,
- Understand the barriers that could potentially prevent a colleague going through the menopause transition from performing at work,
- Be confident about the role you can play in supporting colleagues with menopausal symptoms,
- Understand the practical workplace adjustments available to support colleagues and help them thrive at work, and
- Contribute to an inclusive working environment



People experiencing the symptoms of menopause require the same level of support and understanding in the workplace as anyone experiencing any ongoing health condition.

1. [Impact of Menopausal Symptoms on Work: Findings from Women in the Health and Employment after Fifty \(HEAF\) Study, Dec 2022.](#)

# WHY SUPPORT COLLEAGUES GOING THROUGH MENOPAUSE?



## Menopause impacts wellbeing

**60% of people going through menopause experience symptoms, with 20% facing serious 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.



## Menopause impacts work

**In a UK study<sup>2</sup>, 59% of participants said that their menopause symptoms impacted their work negatively. Nearly 30% took time off work because of menopause symptoms.**

Evidence shows that when people experiencing menopause receive understanding and support from their workplace, the organisation reaps the benefits in terms of lower sickness absence and employee turnover, as well as increased employee engagement.



## Menopause impacts a large proportion of our workforce

The average age of menopause in NZ is 52 (although it may be experienced earlier) and women over 50 are the fastest growing segment of the workforce.

**At AIA NZ in 2022, 61% of employees were women, and 50% of women were between 40 and 60.** We need to ensure that we create a positive working experience for this significant employee group.



## It's the right thing to do

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

**Adequately supporting people experiencing menopause will help to ensure that AIA NZ continues to have a multi-generational and gender-diverse workforce where everyone can thrive.**

<sup>2</sup> Majority of working women experiencing the menopause say it has a negative impact on their work (CIPD), Mar 2019

# HOW DOES AIA SUPPORT EMPLOYEES GOING THROUGH MENOPAUSE?

Menopause affects people in different ways, but there are practical things we can do to support people experiencing menopause at work, and help to minimise some of the most common symptoms. The next few pages will explain some of the options that we offer at AIA NZ.

## Flexible working hours/location

If someone has had a particularly bad nights' sleep, it may be helpful for them to start work an hour or two later.

If someone is experiencing headaches or brain fog they may find the work environment noisy, distracting or overwhelming, so working from home may be preferable.

If someone is experiencing hot flushes, they may feel more comfortable attending a meeting via MS Teams instead of in person.



Employees can contact the Health, Safety & Wellbeing (HSW) Team to receive a complimentary USB fan.



### Be open and honest

Foster open discussion in relation to menopause symptoms. This will help your colleagues discuss the adjustments needed to support their work.

Be careful making jokes about menopause: people can be self-deprecating about their own symptoms as a way of coping, but having other people joke about it is not helpful.



## HOW DOES AIA SUPPORT EMPLOYEES GOING THROUGH MENOPAUSE? (CONT.)

<b>Headaches and fatigue</b>	Quieter areas to work are available, and there is the option to Flex (flexible working policy) where appropriate.
	We encourage meetings to be kept to 25 or 55 minutes so people can take a break between back-to-back meetings – grab a drink, go to the bathroom, or just take a breather.
<b>Hot flushes and/or daytime sweats</b>	Cold drinking water is easily accessible.
	Employees can email the HSW Team for a complimentary USB fan.
	If team members are worried about experiencing these symptoms in front of colleagues or customers, their leaders will be open to changing meeting schedules, and/or providing support for presentations.
<b>Heavy or irregular periods</b>	Washroom and toilet facilities are easily accessible.
	In customer-facing or call-centre roles, team members can speak with their leader if they require more frequent breaks that day.
	Team members can utilise Flex (flexible working policy) to temporarily work from home if they have very heavy bleeding.
<b>Sleep disruption and/or night sweats</b>	Team members and leaders can discuss using Flex (flexible working policy) for a change to working hours, for example a later start and finish time.
	Leaders could allow team members to work from home on an ad hoc basis after a broken night's sleep.
<b>Short-term memory issues, mental health</b>	We encourage a team environment that openly discusses wellbeing and mental health. All teams are encouraged to complete two word check-ins at the beginning of meetings and/or use the traffic light system.
	1:1s are a great opportunity for team members to let their leaders know how they are doing, and to discuss possible adjustments to tasks and duties that are proving a challenge.
	Team members can take time out from others when needed, including Flex (flexible working policy) work where appropriate.
	If you're comfortable having the conversation, discuss whether it would be helpful for the team member to visit a GP, if they haven't already.
	EAP (Employee Assistance Provider) services are available to all employees.

# WHAT'S YOUR ROLE AS A COLLEAGUE?

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

Having awareness about the menopause transition 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 (pg. 5 & 6) will be helpful if a colleague reaches out to you for help or guidance.

## One of my colleagues 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 colleague, **"Are you OK?"** and **"How would you like me to 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** – the menopause is deeply personal and everyone's experience of this biological transition will be different.
- **Encourage them to speak with their leader** for further support.

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

- **Simple changes to how you interact with your colleagues** 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 the menopause.
- Asking a colleague how they are on a regular basis will help to **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 experienced menopause personally, the most effective way to **contribute to de-stigmatising it and ensuring an open and safe environment** is for you to share your own experience, if you're comfortable with this.



# FURTHER RESOURCES

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Australasian Menopause Society (AMS)

- [Fact sheets](#)
- [Infographics](#)
- [Videos](#)
- [Find an AMS doctor in NZ](#)

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[Healthline](#) – 0800 611 116

## English resources

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[Lifeline](#) – 0800 543 354 (0800 LIFELINE) or free text 4357 (HELP)

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[Menopause and the workplace](#) (University of Auckland)

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[NZ Early Menopause Support Group](#)

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[Supporting staff through the menopause: What employers need to know](#) (CIPHR)

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## Te reo Māori resources

[He aha te haumana taiaki ruahinetanga \(MHT\)? He marutau anō?](#)

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[Te ruahinetanga, he aha ngā tohu?](#)

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