

My name is Louise Collins. I am 55 years old and about three years ago I started to experience significant brain fog, high level panic when being driven by others and when driving, regular sleep disturbance (nightly average of 5-6 hours sleep), extreme fatigue, and very low mood, lack of motivation and itchy skin, joint pain, brittle nails, hair loss, tinnitus, irregular and unpredictable menstruation and low level urinary leaking.

I work in Community Liaison in a Higher Education Institution. Part of my role involves responding to complaints from members of the public about student behaviour off campus. I am usually a significantly resilient person and was capable of dealing with sometimes aggressive members of the public without being upset.

My mother had an early menopause and suffered from a lot of debilitating symptoms. I saw this and so was keen to be prepared and informed. I consider myself fortunate to have had the internet to enable me to do online research but also to be perimenopausal at a time that wide campaigning was getting underway by Dr Louise Newson <https://www.menopausedoctor.co.uk>

I am an open person and I found female colleagues were confiding in me and responded when I mentioned symptoms in the office. However, these were mainly hurried and hushed conversations between two women which stopped when a male or younger colleague arrived. I was very surprised that the taboo of talking about the menopause was still so strong. My best friend found it very hard to be open about her symptoms even with me.

My line manager is male and older and I feel unable to discuss my symptoms or their impact on my work with him even though I get on well with him.

I wrote to the HR Equality and Diversity Manager at work in 2019 to encourage them to follow the example set by policing and put a Menopause Policy in place. I backed this up with evidence on the economic impact of women leaving the workplace. They proposed a discussion forum. I attended a couple of these and I feel that they have been hugely beneficial in breaking down the taboo for a lot of female colleagues and for providing reliable sources of medical advice for colleagues. I was surprised at the level of lack of knowledge amongst my female colleagues. Most of whom had no idea about the impacts of hormone deficiency on perimenopausal and menopausal women. However, I was still very keen to see a policy put in place. As of August 2021, despite repeated requests, there is still no policy in place.

- What is the nature and the extent of discrimination faced by women experiencing the menopause?

Written evidence submitted by Ms Louise Collins [MEW0017]

- Menopausal and perimenopausal women are discriminated against due to a lack of training and knowledge of managers in the workplace, GPs and on the basis of sex as a result of the many symptoms related to the perimenopause and menopause.
 - How does this impact wider society?
 - Being unable to access appropriate health care means that women are left to research and often inform their GP about their symptoms and treatment.
 - The taboo of talking about the perimenopause and menopause symptoms along with misogyny, sexism and ageism related to this means that many women are too ashamed/embarrassed to seek medical treatment or even to talk to their families.
 - A lack of treatment can impact on women's mental health, relationships break down and women feel they have to leave the workplace.
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- What is the economic impact of menopause discrimination?
- Nine out of ten women say their menopausal or perimenopausal symptoms have a negative impact on their work - according to a survey of 1,132 women by The Menopause Doctor website (menopausedoctor.co.uk).
- Other findings included:
 - 9% had a disciplinary process, as a result of poor performance
 - 51% of respondents reported having time off work due to their symptoms
 - 51% had reduced their working hours
 - 32% considered quitting their job altogether.
- How can businesses factor in the needs of employees going through the menopause?
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- How can practices addressing workplace discrimination relating to menopause be implemented? For example, through guidance, advice, adjustments, or enforcement.
- Employers have a responsibility to look after the health and wellbeing of all their employees.
- Having a proactive approach when it comes to the menopause is not only the responsible thing to do - it also makes good business sense. Creating a culture where women can talk openly about their concerns with their colleagues and managers, improves job satisfaction and reduces absenteeism.
- Ideally, your employer will already have a menopause policy in place, as part of a holistic approach to employee health and wellbeing. This should include ways staff can access menopause information and support, carrying out assessments to determine what adjustments may be

- needed at work, and awareness training for line managers.
- Sadly, this is not as commonplace as it should be. If your employer doesn't yet have a menopause policy, there are a number of useful resources to help identify what sort of support you should be getting:
 - The Faculty of Occupational Medicine's 2016 guidance on menopause in the workplace is aimed at women going through menopause and their employers. It offers employers practical guidance on how to improve workplace environments for menopausal women (tinyurl.com/menopause-in-workplace). The FOM guidelines advocate menopausal awareness training, making adjustments to the working environments – such as having fans available and relaxing uniform requirements for employees affected by hot flushes. It also calls for flexible working and most importantly, creating opportunities to facilitate discussion about symptoms that are impacting on an employee's ability to work.
 - The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development published a guide in 2019 for employers and line managers (www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/menopause).
 - The British Menopause Society produced a guide in 2019 for employers considering writing their own guidance on the menopause (tinyurl.com/BMS-menopause-workplace).
 - (All the above is available at <https://d2931px9t312xa.cloudfront.net/menopausedoctor/files/information/381/Menopause%20and%20the%20workplace%20v15-03.pdf>)
 - What are examples of best or most inclusive practices?
 - <https://menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk/case-studies/menopause-policy-notts-police/>
 - <https://neu.org.uk/menopause>
 - <https://www.menopausedoctor.co.uk>
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- How should people who experience the menopause but do not identify as women be supported in relation to menopause and the workplace?
 - I would want to see an inclusive policy for all people who experience perimenopausal and menopausal symptoms regardless of gender.

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- I think the taboos surrounding the symptoms may make it challenging to some women to welcome people who present as male in discussion forums etc but promoting the policy and training staff to raise awareness could break those barriers to understanding.
- I think individuals should receive tailored support based on the symptoms they are experiencing, and appropriate adjustments made. I think that individuals should have an accessibility plan based on their particular symptoms. For example, I don't experience frequent hot flushes so do not need to be in an air-conditioned office, however, many colleagues do.
- How well does current legislation protect women from discrimination in the workplace associated with the menopause?
- I think that the Equality Act protects women from discrimination but that there is a lot of ignorance amongst employers concerning this which may lead to increasing numbers of tribunals
<https://menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk/employment-law/menopause-and-employment-law/>
- - Should current legislation be amended?
 - Yes. I think workplaces should be required by law to have menopause policies in place.
 - What further legislation is required to enable employers to put in place a workplace menopause policy to protect people going through the menopause whilst at work?
- How effective has Government action been at addressing workplace discrimination related to the menopause, and what more can the Government do to address this issue? I don't know. I don't think so.
- How effectively is the Government Equalities Office working across Government to embed a strategic approach to addressing the impact of menopause in the workplace? I don't know which could mean that it isn't effective as I'm not aware of it.

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