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[Blog article](#) by **Geraldine McGahey, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission NI**

Menopause Awareness Month

If I were to tell you that there's a health condition which can affect half the Northern Ireland workforce for four years or longer at some point in their lives, you might be worried.

The menopause is that condition and, working jointly with the Labour Relations Agency and NICICTU, we issued [guidance to employers](#) in 2021 to help those managing staff experiencing the menopause through what can be a difficult time for them.

One of the difficulties with managing the menopause at work is that, while most women experience it between 45 and 55, the menopause can happen much earlier for some women. It typically lasts for three to five years, but individuals differ. There's also a range of symptoms; some women experience them all, some not. Every woman's experience is personal and different.

This does not mean that managers need to be experts in women's health, it means that managers need training and support in how to help menopausal women, backed up by a menopause policy that is known about and used.

[A survey from the CIPD](#) published earlier this month has some interesting insights into what employers have done to support employees going through menopause, versus what actually makes the biggest difference to those employees.

The CIPD surveyed 2,000 women aged 40 to 60 and found that 73% of employees surveyed have experienced symptoms related to menopause transition. The most common symptoms reported were psychological, such as mood disturbances, anxiety, depression, memory loss, panic attacks, loss of confidence and reduced concentration. These are reported by two-thirds (67%) and the same proportion, two-thirds (67%), said their menopausal symptoms had had a mostly negative effect on them at work.

Some practical points we can take from the survey are that while the most common support offered by employers are written policies (47%) and menopause support networks (46%), employees reported that the most helpful measures were flexible working and ability to control temperature, and these were offered by only 26% and 25% of employers. A high proportion of employees (67%) said that supporting home and hybrid working makes dealing with menopause symptoms easier.

It's important that employers listen to their staff, understand and seek to accommodate their needs. This is the basis of running a welcoming and inclusive workplace and results in staff loyalty, less absenteeism and better motivation and productivity. Employers also have a duty of care to employees under health and safety law and should be aware of the possibility of facing a claim of sex, disability or age discrimination.

Our guidance contains a checklist, some UK-wide case law decisions and good practice examples from Northern Ireland employers. Employers may not need to develop a specific menopause policy if they have a commitment to supporting women going through menopause in other policies, for example, the equality policy, harassment policy or reasonable adjustment policy. But employers should make it clear that if anyone needs to talk about work issues and their menopause, it will be taken seriously and listened to.

This is about more than complying with the law, though. It may well be that all that's needed to help someone through a difficult patch is a seat by the window, an extra uniform blouse, access to cold drinking water or a fan on her desk. This is about employers taking the initiative to ensure that a menopausal employee has the same opportunity to have a safe, comfortable and productive working life as her colleagues.