



Menopause mini-guide



WAIHANGA ARA RAU
Construction and
Infrastructure
Workforce Development Council

Change is not just inevitable, it's what weaves the fabric of our lives together.

Organisationally, change centres us while providing direction. Culturally, it's what we respond to.

...Yet there's one change still uncovered by corporate Aotearoa, a change that affects half of our workforce — at a critical time in their career, no less.

That is menopause.”¹



Menopause is an important gender and age equality issue in our society.

It is also a significant factor in health and wellbeing in the workplace.

It is important for employers to be aware of how menopause can affect employees at work/in connection to work, whether this be someone experiencing menopause or supporting a colleague through menopause.

Women will go through menopause at some point in some way, and some may find that menopause impacts them at work. With the increasing focus on workplaces being supportive and inclusive, now is the time to consider menopause in the work context. This guide is designed to help you understand and support perimenopausal and menopausal colleagues in your workplace.

Menopause is a natural phase in a woman's life, usually happening between 45 and 55 years old. The average age in Aotearoa New Zealand is 52 years. A 2023 report by the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research tells us that about 70% of women experience significant menopause symptoms, and that 40% will see a doctor because of their symptoms.²

The same report of 500 Aotearoa-based employers found that:

- 67% said women aged 45-55 made a very important contribution to their workplace
- 73% have women aged 45 or older in senior managerial roles

This menopause mini-guide aims to raise awareness of perimenopause and menopause while providing practical support and information for business owners, employers, managers, Human Resources personnel, and leaders within the construction and infrastructure industry.

¹"It's time to normalise menopause in the New Zealand workplace." Global Women, 18 October 2023, <https://globalwomen.org.nz/inclusive-cultures/menopause-workplace/>

² NZIER. 2023. The silent transition: Understanding the impacts of menopause in New Zealand workplaces. A report for Global Women.

Why menopause is a **business issue**

Menopause symptoms, along with what is often a culture of silence in many workplaces and parts of society, can negatively impact women's progression in the workplace.

By supporting women going through perimenopause and menopause, we create a more inclusive and caring environment where our employees - and our businesses - can thrive.

Managers and business owners can lead in this space by working to understand:

- what menopause is
- how it can affect employees
- how businesses can help and/or support employees experiencing menopause.

Developing a workplace culture that supports employees experiencing menopause is **good business practice.**

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|---|--|
| → Demonstrate your commitment to caring for all staff | → Reduce absenteeism and presenteeism |
| → Foster an open and inclusive workplace | → Reduce psychosocial risk/harm |
| → Attract and retain strong female talent | → Reduce recruitment costs |
| → Promote DE&I targets | → Reduce the risk of employee relations issues |



What is **menopause?**

Menopause is when women's ovaries stop producing eggs and they no longer have menstrual periods.

Hormonal changes take place, such as a decrease in oestrogen levels.

Before menopause officially kicks in there is a transition that can last for several years, known as perimenopause, where periods become irregular but menopause symptoms are present.

During this time, women may experience symptoms like hot flashes, mood swings, interrupted sleep and irregular periods.

It can be a really tough time for a lot of women.

Perimenopause

- the time prior to menopause
- symptoms are present and period cycles continue but can be irregular
- this is the body preparing for menopause

Menopause

- usually takes place between the ages of 45-55
- on average lasts between 4 to 8 years
- some women may experience menopause earlier, either naturally or as a result of things like illness, surgery, and some medications.



What can **employers** do?

Different people will feel differently while going through menopause.

This could be due to the symptoms being experienced, people not wanting to share personal information, cultural reasons, or other reasons personal to that employee.

- Don't assume how your employee is feeling, or that they want to talk about what they're going through.
- If they raise it, ask what you could do in a considerate manner.
- Make sure there is information about where to find support or who to talk to in places like employee manuals/intranets in case an employee is having a tough time, but does not want to talk about it.
- Check out our top tips (up next in this guide) for 7 practical strategies to support your perimenopausal and menopausal colleagues and employees.



7 practical tips for supporting perimenopausal and menopausal employees

01 Talk about menopause

if the employee/s in question are open to it.

Say the words and break the silence around perimenopause and menopause. Encourage open conversations and provide resources to educate everyone about what menopause entails. You might like to invite menopause educators into the workplace.

Example:

Organise monthly lunchtime seminars on wellness

- These could cover a range of topics, from the issues covered in this guide to stress, financial wellbeing - the list goes on.
- During a menopause seminar, experts would discuss various aspects of menopause, including symptoms, hormonal changes, and coping strategies.
- Providing informational pamphlets and posters in common areas to raise awareness could also be helpful - just make sure you check that impacted employees are comfortable with this idea first.

Remember

Ensuring a level of comfort is particularly important if there are very few women - or only one woman - in the workplace to whom conversations about menopause could be related.

02 Discuss flexible working arrangements

Offer flexible working arrangements to accommodate symptoms like hot flashes and fatigue. It could mean adjusting work hours, or types of work, or allowing remote work options, where possible.

Example:

Allow employees experiencing severe menopause symptoms to adjust their work hours, such as starting and finishing earlier or later, to accommodate their energy levels and manage fatigue or insomnia effectively.

- Implement a flexible work policy that enables women to work from home on days when symptoms are particularly challenging – if the relevant roles make that possible.
- If not, you could get creative and offer additional wellness leave, or allow the employee to make up time - have a think about whether there are options for that role in your business. Check out our [flexible work guidelines](#) for more advice.

03 Keep it cool

Ensure workplace temperatures are comfortable for everyone. Access to fans (including hand held fans for outside), air conditioning, or adjustable heating systems can make a big difference.

Example:

In an office environment, think about installing adjustable thermostats in office spaces to allow individuals to control the temperature according to their comfort levels.

- Provide personal desk fans or mini air coolers for women experiencing hot flashes.
- Allow employees to wear lightweight, breathable clothing or provide uniform options suitable for different temperature preferences.

04 Offer health support

Provide access to health resources and counselling services. Wellness programs focused on physical activity and stress management can also be beneficial.

Example:

Provide access to confidential counselling services (often known as employee assistance programmes or EAP), and/or offer to cover the cost of GP visits.

- If the employee is actively seeking support, ask them what you could be doing so that you can consider any personalised requests.

05 Establish clear policies

Develop clear policies that explicitly address perimenopause and menopause support in the workplace. Ensure everyone knows their rights and what support is available.

Exmample:

Introduce a Menopause Policy that outlines the rights and entitlements of menopausal employees, including provisions for flexible working arrangements, reasonable adjustments, and access to support services.

- Ensure that any policy introduced is easily accessible to all staff members through the company intranet, employee handbook, and/or toolbox talks.
- Use the Menopause Policy in this guide as a jumping-off point, and make sure you seek expert advice to tailor it to your needs.

06 Upskill your managers

Train managers to support and accommodate perimenopausal and menopausal employees sensitively and effectively, which could be part of wider management training in relation to employee health matters. Empathy and understanding go a long way.

Example: You could hold workshops for managers.

- You can also call in the professionals - there are a number of menopause educators in Aotearoa New Zealand, and if holding wider health-based training sessions, you could look to bring in a range of medical experts for different topics.
- Check out [where to get more support](#) at the end of this guide for a list of menopause education professionals.

07 Create a supportive culture

Foster a culture of support and inclusivity.

Encourage colleagues to be understanding and offer a helping hand when needed.

Gill 45, builder

“It’s a massive thing to get your head around - some days I am all over it and other days I feel anxious and depressed for no reason. I am used to being really strong and holding my own, but now, when the perimenopause symptoms kick in it’s a struggle.

It is really hard ‘cos I don’t know when I am going to experience symptoms and some days I just need to have the space to do things a bit differently.

I felt a bit stink talking to my boss about it - but then I just said, “Mate I’m in the throes of perimenopause and it is a thing”. He was a bit freaked out but now we’re chill.

Now we just check in and divide things up so we get the job done and everyone is happy.”

Kev 55, Gill's manager

“Yeah when Gill told me about perimenopause I was a bit like, “Don’t talk about those things!”

But then I thought it’s a fact of life, and I did some research and we have a plan now for the days when things are hard for her.

She is a great team member and I don’t want to lose her - much easier to make some adjustments than to replace a legend.”

In addition to physical tasks, cognitive tasks can also be a challenge for people experiencing hormonal fluctuations during menopause - and in the trades we know we have to measure twice and cut once!

Emily 48, draughtswoman

Emily, a talented draughtswoman, has been experiencing symptoms of menopause, including brain fog and difficulty concentrating.

As part of her role, Emily is responsible for taking precise measurements and interpreting detailed architectural plans. However, she finds that during periods of hormonal fluctuation, these cognitive tasks become more challenging, leading to increased errors and frustration.

It’s embarrassing and frustrating for her.

As an employer, you could implement the following measures to help Emily with cognitive tasks:

1. Provide additional time

Recognising that cognitive tasks may take longer to complete during menopause, allow Emily additional time to complete her assignments. This reduces pressure and allows her to work at a pace that accommodates her cognitive fluctuations.

2. Encourage breaks and rest

Encourage Emily to take regular breaks and rest periods to help alleviate mental fatigue and maintain focus. By incorporating short breaks into her work schedule, Emily can recharge her cognitive resources and approach tasks with renewed clarity and concentration.

3. Assign collaborative projects

We all need a hand sometimes, so leverage Emily's strengths and minimise the impact of cognitive challenges, assign collaborative projects where she can work closely with colleagues. This allows for shared problem-solving, peer review of measurements, and mutual support, enhancing the quality and accuracy of the work while reducing individual cognitive burden.

4. Offer training and support

Provide training and support to help Emily develop strategies for managing cognitive symptoms associated with menopause.



Menopause Policy template for construction and infrastructure businesses

It is important to take independent advice when drafting and introducing policies.

This template is intended as a base document to get you started.

Remember to seek expert support when implementing a Menopause Policy for your business.

[Company Name] Menopause Policy	
Approved by	[Name], [Role/Title]
Approval date	DD MMMM YYYY
Effective date	DD MMMM YYYY
Next review date	DD MMMM YYYY

Menopause Policy TEMPLATE

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 This policy aims to provide options for employees experiencing perimenopause and menopause to manage symptoms effectively while maintaining productivity and wellbeing in the workplace.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 [Company Name] recognises the importance of supporting employees experiencing perimenopause and menopause and is committed to creating a workplace environment that promotes inclusivity, respect, and wellbeing for all staff members.
- 2.2 This policy outlines [Company Name]'s options for support, accommodations, and resources for employees navigating the menopausal transition.

3. SCOPE

- 3.1 This policy applies to all employees of [Company Name], including full-time, part-time, and temporary staff, regardless of gender or age.

4. DEFINITIONS

- 4.1 Perimenopause: The transitional stage leading up to menopause, characterised by hormonal fluctuations and symptoms such as irregular periods and hot flashes.
- 4.2 Menopause: The natural biological process that marks the end of menstruation and fertility in women, typically occurring between the ages of 45 and 55.
- 4.3 Menopause symptoms: Physical, emotional, and cognitive changes experienced by women during menopause, including but not limited to hot flashes, night sweats, mood swings, fatigue due to interrupted sleep, and cognitive fog.

5. SUPPORTIVE MEASURES

- 5.1 [Company Name] is committed to providing a supportive work environment for employees experiencing menopause by:

i. Encouraging open dialogue and communication between employees and managers regarding menopause-related concerns and needs.

ii. Offering flexible working arrangements, such as adjusted work hours or remote work options, to accommodate symptoms such as fatigue, insomnia, or hot flashes.

- i. Providing access to amenities such as restrooms equipped with feminine hygiene products, hand sanitisers, and adequate ventilation.

ii. Implementing temperature-regulated workspaces and allowing employees to dress in layers to manage temperature fluctuations effectively.

1. HEALTH AND WELLBEING SUPPORT

- 1.1 [Company Name] will provide access to health and wellbeing support services for employees experiencing menopause, including:

i. Information and resources on managing menopause symptoms, available through workshops, seminars, or online resources.

ii. Confidential counselling services or other medical professional support on request and subject to approval.

iii. Wellness programs promoting physical activity, stress management techniques, and healthy lifestyle choices to alleviate menopause symptoms and improve overall wellbeing.

2. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

- 2.1 [Company Name] will support the effective implementation of this policy by:

i. Providing training for managers and supervisors on how to support and accommodate employees experiencing menopause sensitively and effectively.

ii. Reviewing and updating existing policies, such as those related to flexible working arrangements, sick leave, and health benefits, to ensure they adequately support menopausal employees.

iii. Periodically assessing the effectiveness of the policy through employee feedback mechanisms and making necessary adjustments as required.
- 2.2 [Company Name] is committed to fostering an inclusive and supportive workplace culture where employees experiencing menopause feel valued, respected, and empowered to manage their symptoms effectively.
- 2.3 This Menopause Policy reflects our dedication to promoting employee wellbeing and ensuring equal opportunities for all staff members, regardless of age or gender.

Where to get more support

Every workplace is different, with different budgets, restrictions, and requirements.

Here are some helpful resources to help you create the best menopause-friendly workplace for your team:

Resources

- [Menopause at Work](#) provide lots of great free resources to help managers and workplaces incorporate menopause support into their workplaces.
- [Gender at Work](#) offer a Menopause Toolkit, the cost of which at time of writing is \$2000 +GST
- [Nest Consulting](#) provide training for workplaces on menopause and related health topics.

New Zealand menopause educators

- Sarah Connor runs a popular website [Menopause over Martinis](#) and can with help workplace education.
- [Niki Bezzant](#), best-selling author of [This Changes Everything: the honest guide to menopause and perimenopause](#), regularly hosts menopause workshops for businesses.
- [Menodoctor@Work](#) menopause training company offers awareness days right through to 1-to-1 clinical support.
- [Power Pause](#) offers workplace policy consultancy, “Menopause at Work” awareness training, and workplace support resources.

Research

- [The Silent Transition - Global Women and NZIER Report 2023](#)
- [The MenoDoctor Survey Report 2023](#)