

# Menstrual and Menopause Wellbeing Policy

## Policy overview

At Global Health 50/50 we are committed to fostering an inclusive and supportive working environment for all our staff. We recognise that experiences of menstruation and menopause can be very debilitating, yet wider society has been enculturated to mask their existence, including in the workplace.

- This policy supports staff in their ability to adequately self-care during their period and menopause, while not being penalised by having to deplete their sick leave. Periods and menopause are not a sickness after all.
- This policy is designed to provide opportunities for restful working circumstances and self-care for staff experiencing symptoms of menstruation and menopause.
- This policy is designed to be flexible depending on the staff member's needs, including the following options:
  - ❖ Flexible working, including working from home;
  - ❖ Provide quiet spaces for short-term recuperation, rest and management of symptoms;
  - ❖ Enable unplanned leave where required to assist with management of symptoms.
- This policy also seeks to remove the stigma and taboo surrounding menstruation and menopause, through awareness-raising and creating spaces for open conversations.

## Introduction to menstrual health and peri/menopause

Menstruation and peri/menopause are natural biological processes; however, there is still a social stigma around them, and the topics are frequently avoided and concealed within society. This can cause some staff members to struggle in silence. GH5050 aims to create a workplace culture where menstrual health and peri/menopause are openly discussed to enable us to work collaboratively to identify appropriate support or adjustments that enable staff to perform at their best.

## Menstrual cycle and symptoms

The menstrual cycle is governed by natural changes which usually result in monthly bleeding. This process typically happens in a 28-day cycle; however, there are significant individual variations. Irregularity of the cycle can be more common in the years leading up to menopause.

The most common symptoms experienced during a cycle (during or shortly before menstruation) include:

- blood loss;
- menstrual cramps/pain;
- mood changes;
- digestive changes (bloating, constipation, diarrhoea);
- worsening of existing muscle/joint/back pain;
- breast pain and/or swelling;
- fatigue;
- headaches;
- poor sleep quality; and
- temperature hypersensitivity.

Most of these changes fall within the range of typical/healthy experiences and do not necessarily impact greatly on day-to-day activities.

### **Perimenopause and menopausal health**

Each staff member's experience of peri/menopause is unique therefore it is important to consider that support/adjustments will need to be based on individual assessment.

Some of the following signs and symptoms could indicate that someone is experiencing menopause:

- loss of menstruation or irregular menstrual bleeding;
- fatigue and difficulty sleeping;
- hot flushes and night sweats;
- mood changes, including irritability, anger, lack of self-confidence, intrusive and dark thoughts,
- depression and anxiety;
- difficulties with memory, finding words and concentration (sometimes described as "brain fog"), which can affect confidence at work;
- cardiovascular disorders, including hypertension, palpitations, tachycardia;
- headaches that are worse than usual, including migraines;
- muscle and joint stiffness, aches and pains, and osteoporosis;
- needing to urinate more often and more urgently (reduced oestrogen can lead to bladder leakages);
- recurring urinary tract infections;
- carpal tunnel syndrome;
- dry eyes, which can be exacerbated by computer screen work;
- skin changes, such as dry and itchy skin, and acne;
- hair loss; and
- genital dryness and soreness that can make sitting down for a long time or moving about uncomfortable.

### **Support and workplace adjustments**

While many who experience menstruation and menopause will be able to carry on their working lives as normal, we recognise that others may benefit from adjustments to their working conditions.

In order to assist staff with their daily duties, we will explore making adjustments to the role or working environment with the aim of reducing the impact that menstruation or menopause is having. We acknowledge that menstruation and menopause affects each person in different ways so no adjustment will be made without fully discussing it with the staff member.

Examples of adjustments could include:

- temperature control or changing desk location
- access to rest facilities
- providing electric fans
- allowing additional rest breaks
- flexible working or changes to work allocation.

These are examples only and not an exhaustive list.

### **Open conversations and supporting colleagues**

Menstruation and menopause are not just issues for women. All staff should be aware so that they can support those going through it or otherwise affected by it. We expect all staff to conduct themselves in a helpful and open-minded manner and be supportive towards colleagues who may be affected.

To remove the stigma and taboo associated with menstruation and menopause, GH5050 aims to promote a supportive and open culture where conversations about menstruation and peri/menopause are encouraged and not considered problematic. We understand the benefits of raising awareness and understanding around menstrual and peri/menopausal wellbeing and their impact in the workplace across the organisation. Building awareness helps foster an environment where staff can share their stories and realise that they are not alone in this experience. It also prepares staff who are not yet experiencing peri/menopause, reduces the stigma surrounding menstrual health, and signposts staff to where they can access support. We aim to generate awareness through activities such as:

- short educational recordings (bite-sized videos);
- awareness sessions for all staff, including with expert speakers;
- including menstrual health and peri/menopause as topics for 'awareness days and months', for example, Menstrual Hygiene Day (28 May), International Day of Action for Women's Health (28 May), or Menopause Awareness Month, which is every October and includes World Menopause Day (18 October); and
- signposting to external evidence-based websites for information.

It is important that staff prioritise their personal health and wellbeing, and if they are struggling with any aspect of their role because of symptoms associated with menstruation or menopause, we would encourage them to talk to their manager in confidence.

Managers will maintain an open-door policy so staff should feel confident and comfortable in approaching them. Managers will support staff to talk openly about their current situation and will not make presumptions about how it is affecting individuals. Such conversations will be treated sensitively and any information provided will be handled confidentially.

During any discussions, managers will consider the staff member's individual situation and evaluate if any adjustments can be made. They will also arrange follow up sessions in order to evaluate the effectiveness of any adjustments put in place.

We understand that staff may feel uncomfortable discussing personal information with their manager therefore we also encourage staff to access our free and confidential Employee Assistance Programme for support and advice.

### **Risk assessments**

We are committed to ensuring the health and safety of all our staff and will consider any aspects of the working environment that may worsen menstruation or menopausal symptoms. This may include identifying and addressing specific risks to the health and wellbeing of those experiencing menstruation or menopause.

### **Evaluation and review**

We will continue to evaluate and review the effectiveness of this policy to ensure it is achieving its stated objectives.