

Menopause in the Workplace

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Introduction

Menopause is a normal phase of ageing during which oestrogen levels decline and menstruating stops. It affects anyone who has a menstrual cycle: women, trans and non-binary individuals. On average, menopause occurs at around 50 years of age, although it might happen earlier. A cluster of symptoms, both physical and mental, are commonly attached to menopause. These include hot flushes, sleeping difficulties, anxiety, low self-esteem, problems with memory or concentration ('brain fog'), to mention a few. Whilst for some women these symptoms are mild, for others they can be severe and have serious consequences on many areas of their life. In the workplace, severe symptoms can lead to increased absence due to sickness, reduced productivity and performance due to fatigue and sleep deprivation. If not supported, some women might consider part-time work, request early retirement and/or leave the workforce altogether. This can impact on women's progression and financial situation. Furthermore, losing women from the workplace, often at the height of their professional careers, is damaging to the economy.

Before the Employment Rights Act 2025 (ERA 2025), there was no specific statutory provisions on menopause, although women could rely on discrimination and health and safety legislation.

What does the Act say?

- Section 33 ERA 2025 amends Section 78A of the Equality Act 2010 and adds menopause to the existing 'equality action plan': **Equality (Menopause) Action Plans** aiming at 'supporting employees going through the menopause'.
- Employers must demonstrate the steps that they are taking in relation to their employees with regard to prescribed matters related to menopause and how they are supporting employees going through the menopause. Steps should include: training the managers; offering occupational health advice for employees experiencing menopause; setting up menopause support groups and networks; offering workplace adjustments; conducting menopause risk assessment and reviewing policies and procedures to meet the needs of employees experiencing menopause (for example absence policy).
- **Equality (Menopause) Action Plans** are compulsory for employers with more than 250 employees.
- They are voluntary from April 2026 and they will become compulsory in April 2027.

What has Worked?

- The new provisions have placed menopause on the statute book and acknowledged menopause as a legitimate workplace issue, demanding genuine engagement from senior leadership to encourage open dialogue and reduce stigma.
- They complement existing non-discrimination and Health and safety legislation
- They are a formal commitment that moves beyond mere policy statements and sets out practical actions, accountability and timelines, thus ensuring that support is consistent, visible and embedded across the business.

What are the defects?

- These are welcome changes. However, **Equality (Menopause) Action Plans** do not confer any specific individual rights or protections to those experiencing menopause's symptoms.
- They are also limited to employers with over 250 employees, which could create a two-tier system of supports with some employers offering meaningful support and others failing to consider it at all.
- Equality (Menopause) Action Plans are limited to menopause and possibly perimenopause, rather than expressing a more comprehensive commitment to women's health, including menstruation and maternity.

What needs to be done?

- *Extend the Equality (Menopause) Action Plans to all employers or at least lower the threshold to 50 employees.*
- *Introduce a broader approach to recognise that menopause is a component of women's health and linked to other issues such as menstruation and maternity.*
- *More guidance to ensure that the Equality (Menopause) Action Plans do not become a tick box exercise are needed.*
- *Specify what an effective menopause plan can be.*
- *Specify the consequences of not having a truly effective menopause plan.*



For further details, and up to date information once consultations conclude and regulations are published, see IER's new **Working Life Podcast**, or scan this QR code.