

	Policy and Procedure
	NIBRT Menopause Support Policy and Guidelines
Owner: Human Resources Department Number of Policy	029

Revision History and Schedule

Version	Date	Revision Author	Summary of Changes
0	14/03/2023	Elaine O'Farrelly	Policy Statement and guidelines developed and launched.
1			
2			

Approval

Name	Position	Signature	Date

Policy Statement

This Menopause Support Policy has been compiled as part of NIBRT's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and following a recommendation from the Irish Centre for Diversity (Investors in Diversity awarding body). This Policy will outline how NIBRT will support women during Perimenopause and Menopause thereby enabling them to continue to reach their true work potential and facilitating NIBRT in retaining valuable talent in our workplace. It must be stressed that women can continue to work during this phase of their lives and NIBRT is at the forefront in supporting this choice to work, by women. In all circumstances in this Policy where Menopause is referred to, it should also be taken to reflect Perimenopause and Menopause.

Purpose of this Guideline document

This guideline document is intended to inform our line managers and colleagues and in turn to facilitate understanding and support of NIBRT employees going through Perimenopause and Menopause.

The benefit of having an organisation committed to supporting employees impacted by perimenopause and menopause is that it can create a more inclusive workplace. A culture that encourages and supports open discussion and awareness of this subject is likely to motivate employees to engage with colleagues on their symptoms and to feel confident to ask for support.

Context

Menopause is a natural stage of life, as menopausal symptoms are typically experienced for several years, it is best described as a 'transition' rather than a one-off event. The average age for the onset of menopause is between 50 and 51 years old but individually there is a wide variation with early menopause or later menopause occurring in some women. Symptoms of menopause can include hot flushes; night sweats; difficulty sleeping; problems with memory and concentration; headaches; joint stiffness; aches and pains; mood changes, low mood and anxiety, tiredness; feeling low and depressed and lowered confidence.

Unsupported Menopause experiences at work have been linked to women having a higher intention to leave the workforce. For some it is a private matter but for others having the understanding of their manager and colleagues is helpful. There are a number of arrangements NIBRT can provide in order to support employees.

Equality

Menopause is an equality issue and an occupational health issue, where work factors have the potential to impact significantly on a woman's experience (of the menopause) and is protected under the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015 on gender discrimination grounds. Women who are experiencing symptomatic menopause need support, as with any longstanding health-related condition this is crucial and can make a major difference.

Research has found that, in the workplace, women have reported great difficulty in managing symptoms, they may be unable to disclose their menopausal difficulties due to fear of stigmatisation and found that the menopause had been treated as a joke and negatively in their workplace. Studies reported that nearly half of women found it somewhat difficult to cope with work during menopausal transition, whilst an equal proportion of women did not find it difficult at all. Five per cent reported it to be very or extremely difficult.

Depending on the demographics of NIBRT at any time, a considerable percentage of our employees could be experiencing menopausal symptoms. For some, going through the menopause may be uneventful and may not impact on their working life but for others it may become increasingly difficult to function effectively at work and their working conditions may exacerbate their symptoms.

Supports available in NIBRT include the following:-

Open Communication NIBRT wants to foster an open communications culture in inviting employees to engage and discuss what supports could be put in place to assist them through their menopause. This culture of open respectful communications in relation to the menopause will give our female employees the confidence to share their experience and ask for support. Our female members of management are leading voices in promoting discussion and supporting line managers to respond to team members when they express how they are feeling when struggling with symptoms.

Training We recognise that many line managers may want to receive information on this topic and may not be immediately comfortable or find it difficult to handle sensitive discussions. Awareness of the impact that menopause can have is crucial to enable line managers to support and make adjustments, where necessary for their employees.

NIBRT is working to increase awareness and understanding through including menopause as a topic on the NIBRT Wellbeing agenda, launching a guideline document for line managers and employees alike, offering risk assessments through our Health & Safety Lead, encouraging staff to liaise with EAP and where requested by the employee and their GP to introduce the requested supports.

Experiences will differ for everyone going through the menopause transition, line managers will be mindful that some staff may value being able to talk openly to them and others not so.

Point of contact For those employees seeking support during menopause, there are a few options to making an approach for assistance. Some may not be comfortable approaching their line manager, so a point of contact person who is informed on the topic may be more appropriate in some cases. In NIBRT the points of contact are; the HR team or the Health & Safety lead, and additionally our Occupational Health partner . The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) does offer support and advice for employees to access.

Working environment NIBRT consider the workspace implications for employees going through the menopause with regard to ventilation, access to fresh air or desk fans and the availability of drinking water. The physical work environment can have an impact on a woman's menopausal symptom experience.

Reasonable accommodations If an employee is experiencing severe symptoms, absence from work may occur and medical advice may be needed to identify if additional reasonable accommodation within the workplace would be helpful. Considerations for NIBRT include our workplace flexible practices that allow work adjustments, sickness absence procedures that allow women time off if needed for health appointments without penalty, additional breaks during the working day to help during this temporary time of menopausal transition.

Our workplace in NIBRT is enriched by the vast life experiences shared between colleagues on a daily basis. NIBRT employees need to be able to bring their whole self to work and not have to hide major aspects of their life experience due to the challenges they face going through, for example the menopause.

Individual support

If you want to discuss any aspect of the supports offered by NIBRT please link in with one of the points of contact listed above, or any manager in NIBRT. If there is individual support recommended but not provided for above, NIBRT will be very happy to explore that requirement with you.

The role of your line manager

Line managers have a general responsibility to promote a positive, open and inclusive working environment where individuals and teams feel valued and supported and empowered to take responsibility for their work and well-being. Managers are not expected to be experts, but they are expected to have a good understanding of this guidance document. Consider how to communicate to

all team members, your understanding of the NIBRT guidance on menopause and your openness to talking in confidence with any of your team who may come to you.

If a colleague comes to you to discuss how they are impacted by menopause:

- Ensure the conversation takes place in a confidential space. If this is not immediately available, reassure your colleague that you will find one and rearrange the meeting.
- Keep an open mind and actively listen; appreciate the sensitivity of the discussion;
- Reassure them that you are there to help and to find a workable solution;
- Avoid assumptions, judgements and downplaying the situation;
- Explore what supports the individual may require;
- In certain circumstances, depending on the role, work environment and severity of symptoms experienced, a formal risk assessment may be beneficial.

At your first meeting, you may not have an answer to every question or supportive arrangement requested – that is okay. Provide the support and information you can and reassure them that you will follow-up on where further information is needed.

Before the end of the conversation, confirm what is to happen next, including a date for follow-up. Remember, any medical information a colleague shares with you is confidential; do not disclose this information to anyone else, even HR, without explicit permission to do so.

This policy should be read in conjunction with HR – 027 – Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy.