

Module 3 - Step 2 - Menopause at Work – MP3 1 Audio Transcript

Hello and welcome back and here we are facing menopause in the workplace...

In this module we will cover

- Awareness of menopause
- Particular symptoms like lack of concentration
- Absenteeism
- Productivity
- Disciplinary procedures and
- Tribunals

Module 3 - Step Two

Menopause at Work



- Awareness
 - Lack of Concentration
 - Absenteeism
 - Productivity
- Not enough women reaching senior level
 - Disciplinary Procedures
 - Tribunal

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We'll also look at why there is a drop in the number of women not reaching executive levels in the workplace and how Traffic Lights could be useful here.

Let's crack on and remind ourselves about the number of women going through menopause in the UK - 13million! and of this new history we are creating, 50% of those women are now breadwinners. It's always been considered in the past how men are the 'breadwinners' but women are fast catching up and this needs to be represented as they reach peri-menopause. In other words, we need to hold on to those good women!

AWARENESS!

❖ 13million women in the UK
are going through menopause

50% are Breadwinners!

This is NOT a minority issue ~
Be prepared!



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So to re-cap, 75% of women, in this case around 9 million, are experiencing debilitating symptoms of varying degrees and 6 1/2 million women are the breadwinner in their household. A heavy burden falls on women from the caring aspect of daily lives and this seems compounded at peri-menopause, when you add in working full time and caring for elderly relatives, which often happens at this time in life. There is a cultural shift going on and it is obvious to me that this will become a subject of huge concern to employers - not least because they are so unprepared for this new phenomenon - it's like waiting for an accident to happen before doing anything about it.

From my own experience, talking to women and accessing published research on the matter, I'll now talk through the bullet points, listed here, in more detail:

1. Lack of knowledge - nobody and I mean nobody realises that hormones can be the root cause of poor coping skills, lack of concentration, depression, stress and anxiety.
 - We've already covered Symptoms in some detail and so you can see how the interplay of hormones and the general 'stuff' of life, intermingle and cause havoc leaving women totally unaware of what's going on and blaming everyone and everything for their lack of understanding and, on top of that, it isn't their fault because nobody has raised these issues before. Or, if they have, nobody has taken them seriously and they have been swept under the carpet.
2. Symptoms can cause daily distress - hot flushes, sweating, anxiety, palpitations, even depression.
 - Depression is often misdiagnosed because nobody recognises the hormonal element going on! Not enough psychiatrists are prepared to consider hormonal depression but the treatments for the latter could be seen as a better option to anti-psychotic drugs both in the short and long term.

Let's just pause here and think about the symptoms mentioned above, for a moment and how they affect women at work. You are in an ideal place right now to note down where these symptoms can have a disabling effect at work and I'll mention some here:

- Teachers in front of their class - having to make excuses and 'cover' or wear a mask to pretend, not only to themselves but to their class of students, that they can deal with this, they'll work round it. Unfortunately, the reality is they become less productive, have to leave the classroom momentarily and take time off. In other words make excuses for things they are unfamiliar with and have no idea how to deal with.
- Police and Fire services: Control rooms - line managers are not understanding the need for more toilet breaks, the need for fresh air (or a desk fan), and that some women may need a break to change their clothes. The reality is women become less productive and even resentful through lack of understanding on both parts.
- Nurses in a clinic or ward situation, do not have enough opportunities for the toilet breaks, the fresh air, time to change clothes; again breeding resentment through lack of understanding on both parts.
- We can take all of the above into the private sector and look at, say, law and accountancy firms - where we can throw in additional challenges of public speaking where it becomes part of their job - presenting a project, for instance, or, there is often close contact with colleagues and members of the public, across all employment situations, where personal hygiene is an absolute necessity.
- Also consider that these symptoms and others may be too embarrassing to discuss but by overcoming embarrassment on both sides, removing the stigma through better knowledge and understanding - things can change.

What happens at Work?

- **Lack of knowledge** everywhere that hormones are the cause of poor coping skills, lack of concentration, depression, stress, anxiety
- Symptoms can cause **daily distress**
- Lack of disclosure - **Embarrassment**
- **Disciplinary procedures** - Lack of concentration/Absenteeism and even Ageism
- 'Traffic Lights' and 'Symptoms' should help initiate a conversation with relevant staff without offending
- Start a conversation with **managers**
- **Benefit** of hindsight is **too late!**



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I would now like you to take a few moments to consider your own place of work, what happens there; who is affected and what can be done to help resolve this and then think about what H&S situations you can relate to. Make some notes and I'll include space in the Q&A for you to voice your opinions.

Moving on...

There's a general lack of disclosure about reasons for being off sick. Women are not being truthful about what ails them and why they're taking time off. But, I ask you, do they really know?? Nobody, so far, has posed the question of hormonal health and, this is where you come in - armed with your new knowledge and dipping into your Tool Box and looking at Traffic Lights again, you can probably have a better conversation with staff; asking them to think about the real reasons they need time off for and had they considered peri-menopause.

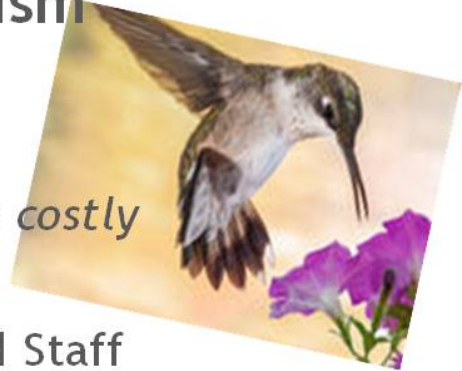
4. Consider again, depression. If the wrong diagnosis is given (and if the options are not shown i.e. hormonal depression or mental health depression), this could lead to long term absenteeism. Another strain on those budgets that could be avoided.
5. The subject of Disciplinary Procedures are cropping up more frequently. I hear about it a lot because it's a focus area of what I do. Let me tell you what's happening:
 - At annual reviews (or any time in between), performance is discussed, where it has been seen that productivity has been slipping and the ability to concentrate has been lacking. There seems to be no resolution as the member of staff does not know the real reasons why this is happening. She is coming up with excuses, blaming the stresses of the job, things at home, the kids, partner, etc, anxiety, even depression. She may have a note from her doctor confirming any one of these as a diagnosis.
 - **What to do about it?** Traffic Lights and Symptom list should be ready on the file to discuss - age group, symptoms, had she ever considered... etc. Once you have the agreement of the staff member, ask her to name three symptoms that are really bothering her and whittle this down to one, you could use the Personal Action Plan here to achieve this as this gives responsibility to the staff member to accept what's happening and support her in achieving results. Achieving results is covered in more detail later on.
 - On the same subject, Line managers need a little more information, too. They are making decisions based on myth and heresay (when it comes to menopause). Line Managers are generally male, mid-40's and when it comes to 'women's problems' they're prepared to accept any excuse and ultimately make a decision through lack of understanding and knowledge thereby putting the employee in the position of facing dismissal and feeling trapped because she is unable to voice what's happening as she doesn't understand it herself.
 - **Result?** You are losing good staff unnecessarily
 - Poor decisions are being reached through lack of knowledge and understanding
 - Trauma and resentment is created on all sides and the situation can escalate to even more poor decision making
6. **Tribunals** - are the worst possible outcome from everyone's point of view. By taking into consideration all the information you have learned here this, surely, must be top of the list on How to Avoid a Tribunal!

As '*the unsustainable cost of absenteeism*' dovetails with the above, I'll continue in the same vein.

You are probably already aware that when it comes to budgets, absenteeism costs are constantly under review where you and others are considering new and creative ways of reducing these costs. Well, it's not going to happen overnight but raising awareness of menopause will have an effect. I'd like to say it will have a 'dramatic' effect but that's just me but they have an effect and certainly in the long term. In the short term, you will see (in this group of women) once the subject of menopause has been discussed, a levelling out of absenteeism and then a decrease. In turn, this should reduce your reliance on agency staff - I appreciate this is a generalisation and really depends on your own particular industry but you will see changes. People want to keep their jobs, they don't want to be seen as unreliable, they'd rather resign and you don't want them to resign because that's even more expensive! Especially when you consider those hidden costs of advertising, interviewing, trailing new staff, etc.

The unsustainable cost of Absenteeism

- Absenteeism levels are high
- Overtime and agency staff are costly
- Budgets are Tight
- Losing Valuable, Highly Trained Staff
- Anxiety and Depression mis-diagnosed
- Lack of concentration is common
- Are you missing the Sweet Spot?



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I urge you to think about all this - this is why I do what I do. I resigned from my own executive position because I couldn't cope. I had no idea what was going on and certainly the fact that I was peri-menopausal did not even enter the frame. I felt as if I was going mad but didn't know why or how to deal with it. Talk about being between a wall and a hard place!

Think about this, it's powerful stuff!

See you in the next section of this module.