Menopause

In recent years, topics that were once hushed up are now openly discussed in our communities and our workplaces. Mental health and domestic violence are two examples: there is now information and guidance available to employers so they can appropriately and effectively support their workers as they face health conditions or private circumstances.
Now researchers are encouraging workers to look at strategies to support women through menopause with new practical guidance.

Why menopause?

Women aged 45–55 (when menopause typically happens) represent an increasing portion of our workforce.
Just under 80% of women of this age were in paid employment. This includes 1 million women working in healthcare, education and retail, the three biggest employers of women in Australia (source: menopauseatwork.org/free-resources).
So chances are there's someone in your workplace who could be experiencing peri-menopause or menopause and their symptoms.

Symptoms and work factors

How women experience menopause varies greatly. Symptoms include hot flushes, night sweats, sleep disturbance, a racing heart, sore joints, tiredness or low energy, and difficulty concentrating. These can affect mood, and be embarrassing or distressing.
Sometimes work factors can aggravate these symptoms: for example, where there is no temperature or ventilation control. Some tasks — dealing with the public, giving presentations — may become affected. Certain work cultures (for example, that are already sexist or ageist) might not support a woman experiencing menopause, either.

How is menopause a work issue?

Retaining older workers with their experience and knowledge is good business sense. It also enhances the diversity of your workplace, and sends positive messages around the contribution of older workers.
Supportive managers and co-workers and a positive workplace culture can help women know they are valuable members of the team, and reduce any negative impacts on job performance and productivity.

What workplaces can do

Wait for a worker to tell you she is experiencing menopausal symptoms; or if you've observed someone having difficulties, perhaps start a conversation with 'I noticed you seemed a bit flushed during that meeting. Is there anything I can help with, to make you a bit more comfortable?'. Remember to respect their confidentiality.
Support can start with providing an empathetic ear: that is all some women may want. Others may ask for more practical support, and some reasonable adjustments you might make to your work practices, conditions, environment might include:

- providing easy access to cold drinking water, washroom facilities and rest areas
- allowing them to re-locate to a part of the workplace where temperatures can be controlled locally
- allowing them to working from home
- allowing them to have, say, two half- hour lunch breaks instead of a one-hour block
- ensuring uniforms are made of breathable fabrics.

If you've made changes, check in to see whether these are working well to support women's experiences of managing symptoms at work.
Making menopause (and women's health in general) a component of your wellbeing program can support individuals, and help everyone become more aware and knowledgeable about their health.

WorkSafe Tasmania resources

Women's health

Other resources

Menopause at work (https://www.menopauseatwork.org/free-resources)
Menopause Information Pack for Organisations (https://www.menopauseatwork.org/_files/ugd/982b52_20cd22ca1ea54426be12aca2c8bdd25c.pdf)
Jean Hailes for Women's Health (https://jeanhailes.org.au/)
Perimenopause and menopause toolkit: NSW Government (https://www.nsw.gov.au/women-nsw/toolkits-and-resources/perimenopause-and-menopause-toolkit)

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