

5-MINUTE MANAGER GUIDE: Menopause-Related Absences

There may be occasions when employees require time off due to extreme and debilitating episodes (such as excessive bleeding), or need to recuperate after a particularly intensive period of menopause-related symptoms (such as exhaustion due to disrupted sleep over a long stretch of time).

- It is down to the organization as to how this time off is recorded but providing a voluntary option to record absence as menopause-related may help to initiate a support structure upon return to work.
- It is also important that there is a mechanism through which absences that are menopause-related can be fed into organizational practices as they may be classified as a form of employee disclosure to the employer.
- If an employee is off work due to menopause-related symptoms, then this is a health-related absence, and therefore covered by labour laws that, for example, protect against dismissal. When employees are absent from work due to health-related issues, there are guidelines about how often and when their employer should contact them.
- During periods of absence, make it clear whom the employee can contact about any matters.
- Be clear about what resources an employee can still access related to her menopause, even if she is not at work (such as employee-assisted counselling programmes)

- For longer periods of absence, it is vital to be clear about return to work plans, as a lack of clarity may cause both anxiety, exacerbating menopausal symptoms for some women, and complications for line managers that might undermine a menopause-positive workplace culture.
 - **Return to work programmes:** Many organizations have formal return to work programmes. It is important to ensure that these have the capacity to cater for menopause in terms of:
 - Providing the opportunity to discuss reasonable accommodation
 - Actioning these accommodations before the individual returns to work
 - **Supervisor-led return to work transitions:** Small to medium-sized organizations will usually make supervisors and line managers responsible for return to work transitions. In these cases:
 - Ensure that there are clear communication lines between the employee, the supervisor and other people in the organization (such as HR designates or business owners) who might have been involved. This will avoid employees having to repeat requests for information and support multiple times.

- It is likely that women returning to work following a menopause-related absence will still be experiencing significant symptoms. Have a productive and positive conversation about what can be done to make the transition back into work successful and sustainable.

EXAMPLES OF MENOPAUSE-RELATED ABSENCE BEST-PRACTICE:

- Provide 'menopause-related' as an option on employee electronic absence systems
- Procedures that connect menopause-related absences with employee invitations to engage with workplace menopause support mechanisms
- Ensuring Employee Assistance Programmes have options for counselling related to menopause matters, and an expert with knowledge on work-related menopause