

Menopause at work: A glossary

Note that an excellent glossary related to menopause-only terms can be found here: <https://www.menopause.org.au/hp/information-sheets/381-glossary-of-terms>

Age discrimination: A legal term defined as unfair treatment based on an individual's age. Direct age discrimination is when a person is treated unfairly due to their age compared to someone else in the same or similar circumstance. Indirect age discrimination is when policies or practices result in unfair treatment.

Ageism: Negative, marginalizing or dismissive beliefs or actions that are premised upon how old the person is perceived to be (often judged by looks rather than chronological age). Ageism is often deeply embedded in social and organizational cultures and can be present even when age discrimination is not evident.

Bothersome symptoms: Bothersomeness is a term that refers to the perceived level of trouble/bother posed by menopausal symptoms for a woman's work/home life. Severity – or, the reported severity of symptoms by women – is another term used in this space. Bothersomeness/severity are different from the (daily/weekly) frequency with which women experience symptoms. Importantly, women may have frequent symptoms, but those symptoms need not be a bother/problem for their lives.

Climacteric: "The phase in the ageing of women marking the transition from the reproductive phase to the non-reproductive state. This phase incorporates the perimenopause by extending for a longer variable period before and after the perimenopause" (Source: IMS)

Early menopause: Menopause that begins before the age of 45. This happens to around 8% of women.

Economic burden: A term mainly used by health economists to quantify the impact of menopausal symptoms on organizations. This may take into account productivity, work impairment, absence and, for studies based in the US, health insurance.

Endometriosis: A condition that affects around 10% of the female population at some stage where tissue that is similar to the lining of the womb grows outside it in other parts of the body. Symptoms include extreme pelvic pain and effects on fertility. "Whilst endometriosis most often affects the reproductive organs it is frequently found in the bowel and bladder and has been found in muscle, joints, the lungs and the brain" (Source: <https://www.endometriosisaustralia.org/>)

Evidence-based: Policies and practice informed by objective data collected through scientifically rigorous processes. This compares with anecdotal evidence that is collected in a casual, informal or inconsistent manner.

Functionality: A term that enables women to report the extent to which (or whether) menopausal symptoms affect their ability or capacity to function at work or in life.

Gendered ageism: When being identified as a woman (or man) and being identified as being older (or younger) is met with a variety of negative social or cultural stereotypes or prejudices. The effect of gendered ageism is not just the accumulative effects of negative views about age and gender (e.g. gender stereotype + age stereotype = gendered ageism), but can produce powerful judgements, perceptions and stereotypes derived from the multiple effects of gender and age-based prejudices.

Hot flush/flash: One of the most common symptoms of menopause. While hot flushes (and night sweats) will be experienced by almost all (Western) women, they will not always be troublesome. The experience of a hot flush (classified as a vasomotor symptom) is unique to each woman, can be concentrated on a particular body part such as the face or neck, or all over the body, and can last from under one minute to over ten minutes. Some women are able to identify early warnings of a flush, or identify them as happening at certain times or due to certain environmental conditions, while at other times, they are sudden, intense and unannounced. Descriptions by women of hot flushes include being in a sauna, feeling 'flu-ey', or stepping outdoors on a very humid day after being in an air conditioned building.

HRT (Hormone replacement therapy): Now referred to as MHRT – Menopausal Hormone Replacement. When "hormones are prescribed during the menopause transition and after the periods have stopped to alleviate oestrogen deficiency symptoms such as hot flushes, mood swings, vaginal dryness and to prevent or treat longer term diseases such as osteoporosis". MHRT can be taken in the form of pills, gels, vaginal creams, patches, implants or IUDs. (Source: Australasian Menopause Society)

Hysterectomy: The surgical removal of the womb. "Sometimes there is confusion about whether having a hysterectomy (the removal of the uterus) will put you into menopause. If your uterus is removed but you still have your ovaries, you will not necessarily go straight into menopause.

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10%-12% of women who have a hysterectomy and keep their ovaries have menopause about 1-4 years earlier than their expected menopause. For most women, menopause occurs at the same time and with the same symptoms as if they had not had a hysterectomy". (Source: Jean Hailes)

Induced menopause: When particular treatments or surgeries bring on menopause (as opposed to natural menopause). These can include an oophorectomy (which leads to surgical menopause), chemotherapy, or drugs used for the treatment of breast cancer such as Tamoxifen or aromatase inhibitors.

Intervention-based: Practices or initiatives that have documented outcomes in terms of their effectiveness or impact. These have often been subject to review by peers and published in high quality outlets.

Menopause: The common popular understanding of menopause refers to the broader period of menopausal transition (see perimenopause). However, in medical terms, "menopause occurs with the final menstrual period (FMP) which is known with certainty only in retrospect a year or more after the event. An adequate biological marker for the event does not exist". (Source: WHO/IMS)

Natural menopause: Menopause that is not triggered or brought on by a medical procedure.

Non-symptomatic: In relation to menopause, non-symptomatic is where there are no identifiable symptoms reported in relation to menopausal transition. While most women will have some bodily experiences of menopause, it may be overlooked, ignored, or not perceived as worthy of mentioning (although this may be the result of taboos surrounding menopause – see 'stigma'). For others, they may have few minor symptoms to the extent they identify as being non-symptomatic.

Objective justification: A legal term that allows employers to use gender, age or other characteristics as a basis of differentiation without legal claims of discrimination. Legal definitions include "a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim" (UK Equality and Human Rights Act). It is often difficult for businesses to demonstrate a 'legitimate business aim' surrounding discrimination linked to health and wellbeing factors such as menopause. This is because symptoms are experienced very differently and for a non-uniform period of time across women.

Oophorectomy: An operation where one or both of a woman's ovaries are removed. This can lead to surgically-induced menopause. (Source: IMS)

Peri-menopausal: "The time from the onset of menopausal symptoms through to the last menstrual period particularly from the onset of irregular periods. It can last an average of 4-6 years before the periods finally stop". (Source: IMS)

Physical or somatic symptoms: Physical and somatic symptoms are body-based (e.g., sore or painful joints). These can both affect women's experience of work, and be affected by their work environment. In particular, workplace design and temperature control have been shown to affect the relationship between physical symptoms and the experience of work.

Post-menopausal: The stage of life following 12 months after the last menstrual period.

Premature menopause: When menopause begins before the age of 40. This happens to around 1 in 100 women.

Pre-menopausal: "Menopause that occurs at or before the age of 40. This may be the result of genetics, autoimmune disorders, or medical procedures or treatments". One in 100 women will experience premature menopause (Source: North American Menopause Society).

Psychological symptoms: May include anxiety, depression, forgetfulness, lowered confidence, lower concentration, stress.

Psychosocial work environment: Factors that relate to the cultural, social, psychological, or emotional experience of work that have an impact on menopausal transition. Examples of psychosocial factors include occupational stress, quality of leadership, work scheduling, job control and autonomy, job insecurity, or sexism at work. Interventions to improve the psychosocial work environment may include more individually focused initiatives such as CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy), mindfulness and wellness programmes.

Reasonable adjustment/steps/accommodation: A legal-based term that requires employers to take steps that are deemed as 'reasonable' to remove disadvantage from people of particular groups. 'Reasonable' is often defined through considerations of cost, organizational resources, size of organization, and how effective that change would be in transforming the disadvantaged person's experience. In relation to menopause, adjustments might include easy access to fans, flexibility in working policies, or adjustments to uniforms.

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Stigma: A cultural term that means a particular feature or characteristic is viewed as shameful, disgraceful, highly embarrassing, and therefore should be hidden or invisible. Menopause is often highly stigmatized in many cultures, meaning there is a lack of language or ways to talk about it in an affirming or positive way. It also means organizations need to consciously reverse or challenge this stigmatization to ensure menopause support policies can be effective.

Successful ageing: A term commonly employed by organizations such as the WHO (World Health Organization) and United Nations and increasingly featured in older worker discussions. It promotes growing older with ideas of good health, active lifestyles, visibility and voice in infrastructure (such as 'all ages' public spaces), continued participation, and engagement in society (and economically). However, critics have suggested successful ageing silences how poor outcomes or disadvantages in older age are caused by socio-economic (rather than individual) factors.

Surgical menopausal (also called surgically induced menopause): "The cessation of menstruation which follows either surgical removal of both ovaries (with or without hysterectomy) or iatrogenic ablation of ovarian function (e.g. by chemotherapy or radiation)" (Source: WHO/IMS).

Symptomatic: A range of physical and/or mental experiences that depart from the individual's or socially expected norms of bodily behaviours. Common symptoms attributable to menopause are hot flushes/flushes, night sweats, and vaginal dryness with related effects including sleep disturbance, difficulties with concentration or memory, irritability and anxiety. Studies have also noted other potential symptoms attributable to menopause such as heavy menstrual bleeding, headaches, depression, sore joints and bones.

Time of life: A term often used as short-hand to reference menopause. Some women use it as they prefer to stay away from the term 'menopause', while others feel it helps to situate their menopause transition within a host of other life events that might be happening at the same time (such as caring responsibilities for parents, health issues for their partners, and changes in focus surrounding career development).

Urological symptoms: Menopause-related symptoms that impact on the urinary function. This can include peeing more frequently, vaginal dryness and increased urinary tract infections.

Vasomotor symptoms: Symptoms related to the body's temperature, more commonly known as hot flushes and night sweats (see earlier). Vasomotor symptoms have been shown to be associated with poor capacity to work (as self-assessed by working women) and can be worsened by certain workplace conditions (e.g., hot workplace temperatures, poor ventilation, public speaking/meetings), and cause difficulty for work performance.