



## MIC Menopause Guidelines for Staff and Students

### 1. Introduction

Mary Immaculate College (hereafter MIC) is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive environment for all staff and students. The purpose of the MIC Menopause Guidelines for Staff and Students is to assist with creating an open and supportive workplace where all can discuss comfortably any issues associated with the menopause, if they so wish, and to ensure necessary and reasonable supports are offered in an emphatic way. Over 36% of female staff are between the ages of 45 to 55 with a further 27% in the 35–44-year-old age group. In addition, 22% of female staff are in the 55-64 category who may continue to experience symptoms of perimenopause, menopause and post-menopause.

### 2. Policy Statement

The menopause is a natural process and for many can be positively managed through lifestyle adjustments and/or medical support. While some may not encounter any symptoms, supporting those with symptoms may enhance their experience at work and sense of positivity. The menopause should not be a taboo or 'hidden' subject and these Guidelines seek to give managers, staff and students the necessary signposting to unearth the subject and elevate supports. These Guidelines set out the steps for providing the right support to manage menopausal symptoms at work and study. From a legal perspective in Ireland, the Menopause is not directly protected through the Employment Equality Acts, however it does come under other aspects that will be explored in Section 7.2 of these Guidelines. The menopause is a natural process effecting women in all workplaces and it is becoming an increasingly high priority for employers.

### 3. Scope

The MIC Menopause in the Workplace Guidelines apply to all MIC Managers, staff and students.

### 4. Related Documents

- [MIC Blended Working Policy](#)
- [MIC Code of Student Conduct](#)
- [MIC Dignity and Respect at Work Policy](#)

- [MIC Equality Policy](#)
- [MIC Student Learning Partnership and Dialogue Charter](#)
- [MIC Code of Conduct for Staff](#)
- [Managing Staff Sick Leave](#)
- [Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2015](#)
- [The Equal Status Acts 2000-2018](#)
- [The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005](#)

### 5. Definitions

5.1 Perimenopause - As women get older, their store of eggs in the ovary decreases and their ability to conceive diminishes. During this time that can last between 4 to 12 years, less oestrogen is produced, and women may experience significant changes including irregular and heavy menstrual bleeding along with other symptoms (see Section 6 for common symptoms).

5.2 Menopause is defined as a biological stage in a person's life that occurs when they stop menstruating and reach the end of their natural reproductive life. For many, symptoms last about 4 years, but in some cases, symptoms can last a lot longer. It is usually defined as having occurred when a person has not had a period for twelve consecutive months. It usually happens between the ages of 45 and 55 but the average age for a person to reach menopause is 51. Menopause can sometimes happen earlier or for reasons such as surgery, cancer treatments (chemotherapy), or a Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) reason. All stages and types of the menopause are different, and symptoms can vary from person to person and range from very mild to severe. There is also a male form of the menopause called the Andropause and PADAN (Partial Androgen Deficit in the Aging Male). Transgender and non-binary people may also experience menopause. It is important that the support is offered to all members of the community.

5.3 Post menopause is described as the time after menopause.

#### 5.4 Common Menopause Symptoms

The experience of the menopause can vary significantly between individuals with some experiencing little to no symptoms, whereas others can experience severe symptoms. It is important to recognise that variation exists in age of onset of symptoms, the severity and longevity of symptoms experienced. In many cases, it is an individual experience, and not comparable with others of the same age or stage of menopause. For some this loss of reproductive ability may be deeply felt, and for each person the menopause is an individual experience. While some people experience few symptoms, for many the symptoms of perimenopause and menopause can be more severe and sometimes this may need medical attention. The impact of these symptoms on an individual's self-confidence, mental health, and relationships with others, can have an impact on their personal and professional lives.

For those with disabilities and with pre-existing health conditions, the menopause can aggravate conditions or even trigger new ones. For example, women with diabetes may find it more difficult to keep blood sugar levels stable, or conditions such as multiple sclerosis (MS), endometriosis, mental health conditions, skin conditions, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia etc. may be exacerbated.

In brief the following can be symptomatic of the Menopause, however, this is not an exhaustive list but are among the most common symptoms:

- Brain fog
- Anxiety
- Impact on confidence
- Sleep challenges
- Aches and pains
- Hot flushes/night sweats
- Insomnia
- Fatigue
- Poor concentration
- Headaches
- Skin irritation
- Urinary problems
- Weightgain

In brief the following psychological difficulties can be symptomatic of the Menopause, including;

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Mood swings
- Irritability
- Problems with memory

### 6. Principles

MIC is cognisant that every individual is different, and it is, therefore, not feasible to set out a structured set of specific guidelines which are applicable in all cases. However, the following guidance is offered to aid managers to support staff and for staff to support students that are experiencing the menopause and for staff and students to seek support when necessary. The menopause needs to be normalised, acknowledged, and accepted as a normal part of the lifecourse across all levels of society and within MIC. By having conversations regarding the menopause, and the challenges it can present in the workplace, progress can be made towards deepening an inclusive organisational culture at MIC.

MIC recognises that staff and students may need additional consideration, support, and adjustments during this transitional time before, during and after the menopause and will endeavour to ensure that staff are treated according to their circumstances and needs. MIC aims to ensure that individuals feel confident in discussing menopausal symptoms and can ask for support and adjustments. MIC is committed to ensuring that all individuals are treated fairly and with dignity and respect in their environment. MIC is also committed to ensuring the health, safety, and wellbeing of the members of the community. Self-management is also vital and positive changes to an individual's lifestyle are encouraged to help manage menopause symptoms.

### 7. Roles and Responsibilities

#### 7.1 Manager and Staff Responsibilities

Managers and staff are responsible for embedding the Guidelines within their area of responsibility and should familiarise themselves with the MIC Menopause in the Workplace Guidelines. They should be prepared and willing to have open discussions about menopause with staff and students, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and professionally. They should, where appropriate, liaise with Human Resources to seek guidance regarding any adjustments proposed, and actions to be implemented. If an employee or a student wish to speak about their menopause symptoms, or just to talk about how they are feeling, please ensure that you:

- a) Allow adequate time to have the conversation.
- b) Find an appropriate room to preserve confidentiality.
- c) Encourage them to speak openly and honestly.
- d) Suggest ways in which they can be reasonably supported.
- e) Attend training sessions, and develop briefing sessions, for staff.
- f) Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these guidelines in respect of related absence levels and performance.

One of the most valuable things that managers and staff can do is listen and respond sympathetically if issues relating to menopause are reported. These conversations can assist to identify support at work and/or at study that can make a real difference with coping with the menopause. This may enable the individual to continue working well, productively and to remain at work and/or study. It is important to note that staff and students experiencing menopausal issues may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed to make an approach. However, if a manager or member of staff supporting students is aware of the symptoms associated with the menopause and how this can affect a person, this can greatly assist in promoting an environment where staff and students feel more confident to approach and seek support, if required.

#### 7.2 Adjusting your Role

To assist people in their daily duties, Managers and staff supporting students should explore adjusting an individual's role, work or study environment with the aim of reducing the effect that the menopause is having on them. A discussion can be conducted to identify potential issues and no adjustment should be made without fully discussing it with the staff member or student first, and HR where appropriate.

Examples of adjustments include:

- Changing the staff working or teaching location to be closer to toilet facilities, away from hot and cold spots around the office or to ensure greater access to natural light.
- Implementing further temperature control, such as access to a fan.
- Assessing how work is allocated and whether the employee is affected at points of the day.
- Allowing additional rest breaks.
- Considering flexible working hours or allowing the individual to work from home

temporarily as part of the MIC Blended Working Policy.

- Once the adjustments are agreed, they should be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure they are having the required effect.

MIC is legally obliged by the *Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2015* and *The Equal Status Acts 2000-2018* ('the Acts') to make reasonable adjustments to an employee's role or working conditions that places them at a disadvantage when performing their role and we will ensure compliance with our obligations in this regard. While the *Equality Law Acts* do not expressly provide protection for menopause or perimenopause as such, individuals who suffer discrimination in the workplace that is related directly or indirectly to them having menopausal symptoms may be able to seek legal remedies if alleging that they have suffered unlawful discrimination or harassment on the grounds of sex, disability, or age. MIC is also legally obliged by the *Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005*.

### **7.3 Staff and Student Responsibilities**

All members of staff and students have the following responsibilities:

- Ensure they understand and adhere to these Guidelines and associated practices and procedures.
- To take personal responsibility to look after their health.
- To be open and honest in conversations with Managers/HR/Student Support Services.
- To be mindful of policies such as Dignity and Respect, Staff and Student Code of Conduct.
- Contribute to a respectful and productive working and study environment.
- Be willing to help and support their colleagues/students.

### **7.4 Communication and who to speak to**

It is important that, as a member of staff or student, you prioritise your personal health and wellbeing. If your professional or student life is impacted by symptoms associated with the menopause, you should have a conversation with your concerns with your manager or student support personnel/lecturer, who will treat the matter with complete confidence. To ensure we can provide you with the best support possible we encourage you to be open and honest in these conversations.

We understand that you may feel uncomfortable discussing personal information with your manager or student support personnel/lecturer. If this is the case, you are encouraged to discuss your situation with another senior member of staff, a representative of the HR or EDII departments or your Union representative or the MISU.

During any discussions, your manager or student support personnel/lecturer will consider your individual situation and evaluate if any adjustments can be made. Your individual needs will be addressed sensitively, and confidentiality will be maintained, in so far as is possible. Managers or student support personnel/lecturer will also arrange follow up sessions to evaluate the effectiveness of any adjustments put in place.

### **7.5 Training**

MIC will offer training to management and staff to be trained on the menopause, and on how to hold discussions with staff and adjustments that can be made. Please contact the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Interculturalism Office (EDII) or email [edii@mic.ul.ie](mailto:edii@mic.ul.ie)

### **7.6 Behaviour of Others**

There is an expectation on all staff and students to conduct themselves in a helpful and open-minded manner towards their peers.

MIC maintains a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment and will treat all complaints seriously. If you feel that you have been mistreated in any way because of matters related to the menopause, please make your concerns known to your Manager, member of the Human Resources team or student support personnel/lecturer.

### **7.7 Self-care Products**

MIC and MISU provide self-care products in all toilets.

### **7.8 Associated Documentation**

*Appendix 1 – Menopause Hub and Ibec infographic of Survey Key Findings (2021)*

### **7.9 Employee Assistance Service (EAS)**

The MIC Employee Assistance Service (EAS) is managed by Spectrum.Life. It is a confidential service, providing support to employees, and, in addition to their spouse, civil partner or dependant/s, where the family member can be described as a person over the age of 18 and residing in the family home. The EAS is available 24/7, 365 days a year 24/7 providing in the moment clinical support, with referral to counselling where clinically appropriate.

The freephone number is 1800 814 243 and there is a further option to send a Whats App or SMS Text message saying 'Hi' to 087 369 0010. Standard rates apply for WhatsApp and SMS messages.

There is also a Spectrum Life Online Portal/App. This is a wellbeing app that provides access to hours of wellbeing content. Topics covered are based on the three core areas of mental wellbeing, nutrition, and exercise. Track steps, find recipes, followed guided mediations, log and track calories, find fitness plans to suit needs, and complete course in stress management, sleeping better, dealing with anxiety and more.

Register via the below link (the organisation code has been prefilled): [Mary Immaculate College Employee Assistance Service](#)

### **7.10 Human Resources and MISU**

You may also contact the [Human Resources Office](#), [Equality Diversity, Inclusion and Interculturalism Office](#) (EDII) and [MISU](#) for advice.

### **7.11 Additional Support**

Any queries or requests in relation to this Guidelines should be directed to your Line Manager in the first instance. For further information or queries in relation to the above, you can contact the HR Office at:

The Menopause Hub - <https://www.themenopausehub.ie/>

The Wellness Warrior - <https://www.wellnesswarrior.ie/>

### **7.12 Additional Resources**

'All you need to know about Menopause' by Catherine O'Keeffe is now available to borrow from the [MIC Library](#) as an electronic copy with unlimited access and print copies are also available with additional books to be added to the menopause collection.

### **7.13 Useful Links for Menopause Support**

RCSI MyHealth: [Living well through perimenopause and menopause](#)

RCSI MyHealth: [Menopause Part II – From Coping to Thriving](#)  
[Women's Health Concern](#) of the British Menopause Society

Appendix 1 - Menopause Hub and Ibec Infographic of Survey Key Findings (2021)

