



Women's  
Health



January 2024

## Menopause / Healthy Aging in Women

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Women's Health Issue Brief, Part 5

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This is part five in a series of briefs about key women's health issues with particular relevance to women of workforce age and for which employers can act to improve both the quality of life and health of women in the workforce. Each brief provides a general overview of each of the women's health issues below and then describes research related to employer workforce and/or health care costs and health inequities as applicable.

### Other briefs in this series:

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**Part 1, Overview of Women's Health**

**Part 2, Women's Mental Health**

**Part 3, Cardiovascular Health in Women**

**Part 4, Obesity in Women**

*Menopause symptoms can negatively impact a woman's overall quality of life and affect workforce participation decisions and productivity. A recent study by the Mayo Clinic estimated an annual loss of \$1.8 billion in the U.S. due to missed workdays attributed to menopause symptoms.*

# Overview of Menopause / Healthy Aging in Women

There are many symptoms that women may experience as they transition through perimenopause and menopause. In addition, for many women these symptoms last around seven years, with some experiencing symptoms for up to 14 years or longer.<sup>1,2</sup> The symptom experienced may include any of the following:<sup>3</sup>

- Menstrual cycle changes, e.g., abnormal bleeding, which can range from light to heavy and be irregular
- Vasomotor symptoms (VMS), e.g., hot flashes and night sweats
- Symptoms associated with genitourinary syndrome of menopause (GSM), e.g., vaginal dryness or burning, painful sex, recurrent urinary tract infections, urinary incontinence, urinary frequency and/or urgency
- Other symptoms that may be associated with menopause:
  - Sleep disturbances
  - Cognitive concerns (memory, concentration, brain fog)
  - Psychological symptoms (mood changes, depression, anxiety)
  - Headaches
  - Decreased libido
  - Joint pain/stiffness
  - Weight gain

Each woman's experience with menopause is unique. Symptoms vary in severity, duration, and impact<sup>4</sup> as well as across race and ethnicity. Vasomotor symptoms (e.g., hot flashes and night sweats) are the most common and bothersome symptoms reported by women, with up to 80% of women reporting these symptoms during the menopause transition.<sup>5,6</sup>

This issue brief uses gender-specific language and the term “women” for simplicity although much of this information may also apply to transgender men, nonbinary individuals or those who may identify differently than the gender and pronouns used in this issue brief.

## Definitions

### Perimenopause

The stage of life before and just after the transition into menopause, which begins with the onset of irregular menstrual cycles or other menopausal symptoms and extends to include the twelve months after a woman's final menstrual period.

### Menopause

A natural part of aging that usually occurs between ages 45 and 55 as a woman's estrogen levels decline. Menopause is signaled by twelve consecutive months since a woman's last menstruation. The menopause transition can last up to twenty years.<sup>7</sup>



## Health Differences and Inequities Related to Menopause

Women of color are at greater risk of worse health outcomes, endure more severe symptoms and experience menopause for longer than white women.<sup>8</sup> More Black women experience vasomotor symptoms than white women, and they also have these symptoms for a longer time (e.g., 10 years for Black women compared to 6.5 years for white women).<sup>9,10</sup> Women of color report lower quality of life than white women and may be less likely

to receive treatment.<sup>11,12</sup> Women who receive treatment and experience improvements in quality of life are likely to be more highly educated, white and have higher incomes.<sup>13</sup> This means that women of color, and Black women in particular, are facing not only more severe symptoms and for longer but are also not receiving adequate treatment for symptoms.<sup>14</sup>

## Menopause & Employer Workforce and/or Cost

Women comprise almost half of the U.S. workforce, with over 40% of working women age 45 or older.<sup>15</sup> The majority of women experience menopause between the ages of 40 and 58,<sup>16</sup> meaning that menopausal women represent a large, growing segment of the global workforce. Furthermore, some women experience menopause prematurely (younger than age 45) due to medical interventions, such as removal of both ovaries, chemotherapy or radiation, making the percentage of working women experiencing symptoms of menopause even higher. Unfortunately, menopause symptoms can negatively impact a women's overall quality of life and affect workforce participation decisions and productivity.<sup>17,18,19</sup> A recent study by the Mayo Clinic estimated an annual loss of \$1.8 billion in the U.S. due to missed workdays attributed to menopause symptoms.<sup>20</sup>

Experiencing symptoms of menopause can negatively impact women in the workforce. A 2022 survey of more than 1,000 working women found that four in ten women age 50 to 65 years old stated that menopause symptoms interfered with their work performance or productivity on a weekly basis.<sup>21</sup> Another study found that increasing severity of vasomotor symptoms (VMS) was associated with greater degree of impairment in work productivity among women aged 40-65 years.<sup>22</sup> Challenges with managing symptoms at work may result in increases in absenteeism with nearly a third of working women ages 45 to 55 reporting they have taken time off work to manage symptoms.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, women with problematic menopausal symptoms were 43% more likely to leave their jobs by age 55 and 23% more likely to reduce their work hours.<sup>24</sup> In another recent survey of over 900 working women ages 40 to 55 in the United States, 33% of the women surveyed reported that menopause impacted their work performance and 20% -reported they had left or considered leaving a job because of symptoms.<sup>25</sup>

Research has also highlighted the impact of depression among women reporting menopausal symptoms; approximately one-third of women who reported experiencing hot flashes also reported depression. These women reported significantly worse quality of life and work productivity.<sup>26</sup> Twenty-four percent of Black women

or people of color in comparison to 16% of white women have not pursued a promotion because of menopause symptoms. Furthermore, 63% of Black women or people of color were concerned about ageism if they shared openly about a menopause experience in comparison to 51% of white women.<sup>27</sup> Women experiencing menopause and depression also incur higher health care resource use and costs for employers.<sup>28</sup>

Perimenopause and menopause symptoms may impact women's quality of life and work productivity leading to economic impacts for both women and employers. This presents an opportunity for employers to better support women during this life transition. Moreover, a survey of professional women found that there is a strong interest in menopause support from their employers. Over 40% of respondents reported the need for additional employer support for menopause with an even higher percentage of Black women wanting menopause support from their employers than the percentage of white women wanting more support.<sup>29</sup> Better treatment and support for women experiencing symptoms of menopause may reduce absenteeism, encourage retention of female employees, and reduce health costs.

To support women in the workforce, education and awareness about menopause and the impacts it can have on a woman's daily life and long-term health is important. Education is also essential to ensure that women are aware of the available treatment options and to clarify their preferences so that they can make informed decisions.<sup>30</sup> In addition, employer can work with their health plans to ensure women have access to a variety of treatment options and therapies to address menopause symptoms. With access to providers who provide evidence-based care of perimenopause and menopause, most women can effectively minimize and manage their symptoms. More information about treatment recommendations and guidelines is provided by [The Menopause Society](#), formerly The North American Menopause Society (NAMS).

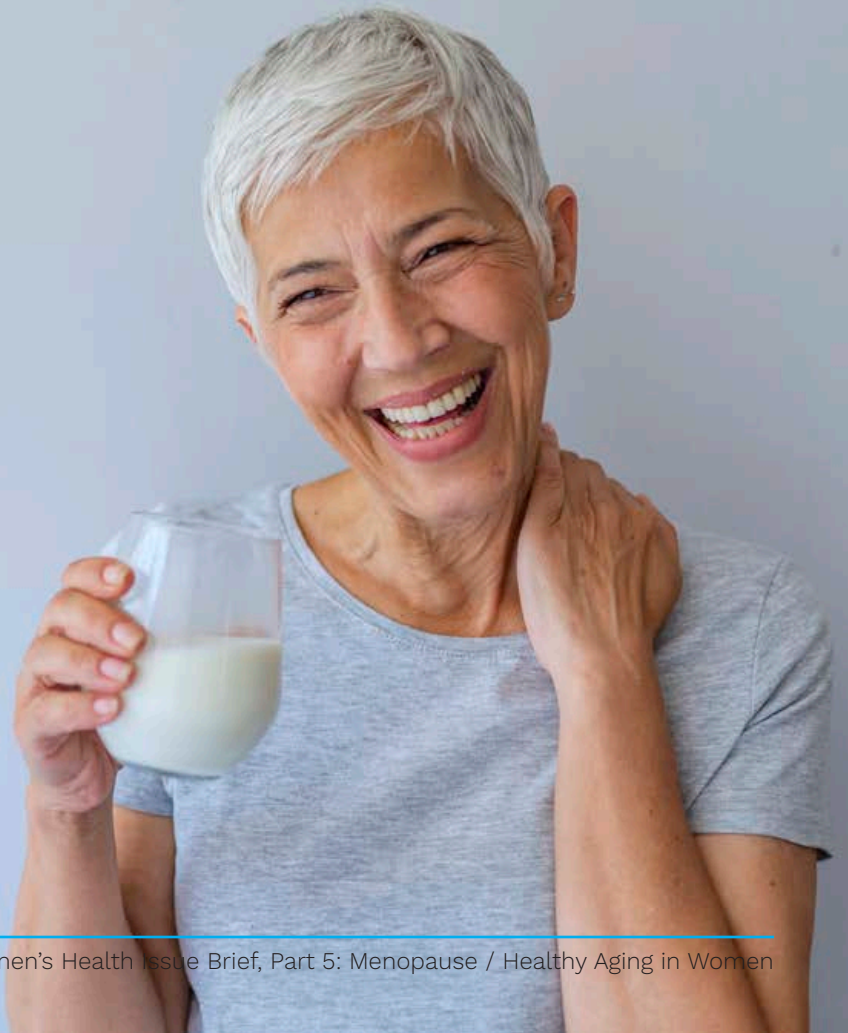
Employers can also create a supportive company culture and empower employees to recognize and address symptoms; employers could create a company menopause

policy (example: [Menopause Policy](#)) Policies might include access to flexible work-from-home, earlier or later start times, sickness or leave of absence policies, etc. Employers could also provide occupational health assessments to ensure that employees' physical environments are not making menopausal symptoms worse.

Employers could offer company information sessions or host a company-sponsored menopause campaign to raise awareness around the connection between menopause and employee well-being, reduce stigma and normalize this period of life for female employees and their male counterparts. Female business leaders could also be encouraged to discuss their experiences with menopause to create inclusivity and empower other women.<sup>31</sup> Mr. Cooper Group, a mortgage company, provides a broad

range of programs and services to advance women's health issues globally, including navigational support through Peppy Women's Health. Peppy Women's Health provides health support to women of all ages to improve their wellbeing, overall health and work productivity and addresses conditions and life stages such as menopause, endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). Mr. Cooper has also embraced opportunities like Women's History Month and International Women's Day to celebrate and acknowledge women.<sup>32</sup> To provide an alternative for employees to speak to someone other than their managers, employers could form and promote Employee Resource Groups to support female employees experiencing symptoms. These measures could all help to promote the destigmatization of menopause in society and in the workplace.

*For issue briefs on more women's health topics, [click here](#).*



## Endnotes

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## Endnotes (continued)

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This issue brief was sponsored  
by Astellas.



## About the Purchaser Business Group on Health (PBGH)

Purchaser Business Group on Health (PBGH) is a nonprofit coalition representing nearly 40 private employers and public entities across the U.S. that collectively spend \$350 billion annually purchasing health care services for more than 21 million Americans and their families. PBGH has a 30-year track record of incubating new, disruptive operational programs in partnership with large employers and other health care purchasers. Our initiatives are designed to test innovative methods and scale successful approaches that lower health care costs and increase quality across the U.S.



