Traditionally, the menopause has been a taboo topic. As a result most colleagues, including line managers, are not aware of the challenges that many individuals face during this period in their lives. While not all women suffer with menopause symptoms, supporting colleagues who do will improve their experience at work.

Symptoms, which can be both physical and psychological, include poor concentration, fatigue, headaches, poor memory, feeling low/depressed, anxiety, panic attacks, heavy/light periods, lowered confidence and hot flushes. Some colleagues may also experience difficulty sleeping. These symptoms can be very distressing, especially when one feels that they need to hide them. The features of work that make symptoms more difficult to cope with include working in hot and poorly ventilated environments, formal meetings and high visibility work (e.g. presentations). With the right support, colleagues undergoing this transitional phase can feel less daunted.

It is not appropriate to mention the menopause phase if the colleague does not bring it up. However, Royal Holloway does want to foster an environment in which colleagues going through the menopause can openly initiate conversations around this transitional phase if they wish to, and discuss the challenges that may come with this.
Regardless of whether the menopause is explicitly brought up, here are some things to be aware of:

1. Be willing to have an open discussion about the menopause and how symptoms may be affecting the member of staff and any adjustments that may be required, treating the discussion sensitively and professionally. Keep a record of agreed adjustments, ensuring ongoing dialogue with review dates in place.

2. Colleagues may benefit from knowing there is someone they can talk with, formally or informally, to discuss any difficulties they are facing. Points of contact at Royal Holloway include: Employee Assistance Programme and Occupational Health (the employee needs to be referred to occupational health via an HR Manager). The Royal Holloway Women’s Network (RoWaN) organises informal ‘Menopause at Work’ support meetings. For further information email rowan@royalholloway.ac.uk. If the member of staff has not yet visited their GP, this could constitute a next step, especially if symptoms of anxiety and/or sleeping difficulties are involved.

3. Flexible working: some colleagues experiencing the menopause may suffer from lack of sleep; they may feel they need to leave the room or the workplace suddenly, and/or may need longer breaks. Supporting colleagues by discussing flexible working patterns, and removing feelings of guilt, can make a big difference.

4. Some individuals who have chosen to undergo Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) may take some time to adapt to this treatment and may need to take time off work. In addition, colleagues may need to be given time to attend medical appointments, the frequency of which will depend on their needs. It may also be appropriate for them to take time away from work to attend relaxation-oriented sessions (further information below).

5. Discuss workplace temperature and ventilation. If there are issues, solutions could include moving a desk nearer to a window or further away from a radiator, unlocking a window, providing a fan, enabling access to a fridge with cold water.

6. Mention relaxation opportunities available at work e.g. Mindful Mondays Meditation sessions and discounted massage sessions (for appointments, colleagues can contact Mary Rayner). Health and Wellbeing also organise Wednesday Wellness Walks as well as yoga and relaxation sessions which take place during term-time on Thursdays at 5.30pm (colleagues can email Moya Watson for further information on yoga).

7. Further sources of information and resources include:
   • NHS – Menopause
   • NHS Menopause self-help tips
   • Healthtalkonline
   • The Menopause Exchange (colleagues can sign up for their free newsletter)
   • Women’s Experience of Working through the Menopause – BOHRF