



**BRITISH
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1st March 2024

Meno'paws' Law

As the British Veterinary Union in Unite's (BVU) elected Women's Representative, and as someone who is approaching the age at which perimenopause occurs, I very much welcome the new menopause [guidance](#), issued by the Equality and Human rights Commission (EHRC).

We all should do. It will benefit everyone, either directly by improving the workplace environment, or indirectly through improving the working conditions of loved ones.

Menopause symptoms can have a significant impact on women at work. And the vast majority of employees in the Veterinary Sector are women (For example, [IVC Evidensia Sustainability Report](#) states that 87% of colleagues are women).

[Research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development](#) found that two thirds (67%) of working women between the ages of 40 and 60 with experience of menopausal symptoms said they have had a mostly negative impact on them at work.

Of those who were negatively affected at work:

- 79% said they were less able to concentrate
- 68% said they experienced more stress
- nearly half (49%) said they felt less patient with clients and colleagues, and
- 46% felt less physically able to carry out work tasks.

As a result of this, over half of respondents were able to think of a time when they were unable to go into work due to their menopause symptoms that can include anxiety, mood swings, brain fog, hot flushes, and irregular periods.

[Further research by the Fawcett Society](#) found that one in ten women surveyed who were employed during the menopause left work due to menopause symptoms.



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The New EHRC menopause guidance states that employers could be sued for disability discrimination if they fail to make “reasonable adjustments” for women going through menopause.

An objective assessment of [whether an adjustment is reasonable](#) is considered based on its effectiveness, practicality, cost, the organisations resources and size, and the availability of financial support. A reasonable adjustment for a small medium enterprise (SME) would not necessarily be the same for a large corporate. If an adjustment costs a significant amount, it is more likely to be considered reasonable for an employer to do it, if the employer has substantial financial resources. These resources must be looked at across the whole organisation, not just for the branch or section where the employee considered disabled due to the menopause is, or would be, working.

Examples of [“reasonable adjustments” relating to the menopause](#) include provision of rest areas and quiet rooms, fans, relaxing uniform policies to allow for wearing cooler clothing, promoting flexible working and allowing staff to work from home where possible, and alterations to shift patterns (such as varying start and finish times particularly on warm days or after the worker has had a poor night sleep). Menopause-related absences should be recorded separately from other types of absence. Taking disciplinary action because of menopause-related absence could be unlawful discrimination, unless justified. Equally, using language that ridicules a worker in relation to their menopausal symptoms could be harassment related to age, sex or disability.

The costs of failing to make workplace adjustments for staff can run into hundreds of thousands of pounds when considering the loss of talent and costs of defending a claim. Yet fulfilling legal obligations by making changes to the workplace and the working environment does not need to be difficult or costly. Indeed, making workplace adjustments will help organisations to attract and retain valued workers.



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The EHRC has also issued guidance about [how to have conversations](#) about the menopause in the workplace.

More information and support materials about the “Menopause at work” can be found on the [Unite website](#).

Remember, if you are directly affected by issues raised in this article, you are not alone. The BVU is your team. The BVU is the only veterinary organisation that is run by, serves, and represents all members of the Veterinary sector, including vets, RVNs, VCAs, receptionists and students. As BVU members, together we are stronger, and can work towards improving our working conditions collectively. We are entitled to a range of legal protections and privileges, including working towards collective bargaining. Please get in touch if you would like more information or support, at bvu@unitetheunion.org.

In solidarity,

Mrs Anna Bramall BVM&S MRCVS
BVU Women’s Representative