

Getting through menopause years while working

By your late 40s and early 50s, your career may really be taking off—and you have no intention of slowing down. (Go you!) Unfortunately, menopause comes along and might have other ideas. There are going to be days when your symptoms feel debilitating. Know that you're not alone and aren't the only one going through this. Remember, menopause is a natural part of the life cycle. There's no reason to apologize, suffer in silence, or hide what you're going through. Yes, even at work.

Maven Career Coach Kathy James says open communication is the only way to break the stigma about menopause in the workplace and get the support you need.



HOW MENOPAUSE CAN AFFECT YOUR WORK

Menopause symptoms like hot flashes and brain fog are no joke. And when they flare up, they can start to affect your work performance. It's hard to do your best work when you're not feeling well or not feeling like yourself.

Some of the more specific ways menopause affects your work:

- Brain fog can make it hard to concentrate, remember important details, or plan ahead
- Mood swings and other mental health changes can make it difficult to manage work stress or work with others
- Difficulty sleeping can make it hard to wake up in the morning and focus on work
- If your workplace requires a strict dress code or uniform, it can be really hard to keep cool or not sweat through with hot flashes

THE BOTTOM LINE

Menopause isn't usually openly talked about at work. But the only way that's going to change is if more people start to speak out about their experiences. Don't be afraid to break the stigma and stand up for the support you (and others) need at work.

SHOULD YOU BE OPEN ABOUT MENOPAUSE AT WORK?

It's up to you how open you want to be with your manager and co-workers. But if you aren't close with your manager, you might want to keep the conversation more general. You can also speak with someone from HR instead. You can say: "I'm dealing with some health changes. I'm going to keep things private and not get into it, but I just want you to be aware of it."

If you don't think your company has any policies or accommodations in place when it comes to menopause and is generally open to new ideas, you can also ask them to consider making some! Starting the conversation can be an important first step. If your workplace seems to open to the conversation, you can even suggest some accommodations that can help you and others going through menopause be more comfortable.

Accommodations you might want to ask for:

- Flexible work schedule (making your own hours) if possible
- Working from home when needed (or all the time) if possible
- More frequent breaks throughout the day
- A fan or portable AC at your workspace (you can also bring a small one from home to keep on your desk)
- Changing your desk to move closer to a window that opens
- Extra time to prepare for meetings or presentations (because brain fog is real)
- Readily available cold water and ice machines
- In-office "cool off" area or room (where there could be fans or portable AC units, ice water to drink, and places to sit or lie down).

SOME MORE PRO TIPS FOR GETTING THROUGH THE MENOPAUSE YEARS WHEN WORKING:

- Ask if you can start an online or in-person group for menopause support for other team members going through what you're experiencing
- Attend meetings over video call or phone instead of in person if you can. (No long pants necessary. Plus, you can have all the fans going on you off camera.)
- Set lots of reminders on your calendar and phone in case brain fog strikes
- On work-from-home days, sleep in or take short cat naps if you can