

## Greenpeace Nordic Menstruation and Menopause Procedure

Policy Category: Procedure

Written by: Celeste Stewart and Ida Wahlin

Policy Owner: Celeste Stewart, Fundraising and Deputy Executive Director

Applicability or Scope: All Greenpeace Nordic people

Approval Path: FR and Deputy ED > Senior Management Team > Executive Director

Approved on: 03-03-2023

Next Review: 2028

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### Introduction

Greenpeace Nordic is committed to providing an inclusive working environment for all employees throughout all stages of their working lives. This includes enabling employees who are experiencing problematic periods or menopausal symptoms to get the support they need in order to manage their symptoms at work.

Experiences of menstruation and menopause can be very debilitating, yet we have been enculturated to mask their existence in the workplace, at schools and at home. At Greenpeace Nordic we aim to support employees in their ability to adequately self-care during their period and menopause, and also seek to remove the stigma and taboo surrounding menstruation and menopause.

To achieve this, it is important for managers and employees to have an awareness of menstruation and menopause and to know that not everyone experiences these in the same way. These topics should not be taboo or hidden and can be discussed openly and without embarrassment.

No assumptions should be made that these issues only affect women, as people who identify as non-binary, transgender and intersex may also experience symptoms.

Menstruation and menopause can have a negative impact on an employee's personal and working life. Although not everyone will experience symptoms, by supporting those who do, it is hoped that this will improve their wellbeing at work and minimise any impact on attendance or performance at work. By creating an inclusive working environment it is hoped that this will encourage staff to ask for what they need, without judgement.

Through this procedure we aim to:

- Create an environment in which employees can openly and honestly initiate or engage in discussions about menstruation and menopause, whether they themselves, or someone they are supporting, is experiencing symptoms.
- Normalising the symptoms by increasing awareness, so that they can be met with tolerance and acceptance between colleagues in the workplace.
- Provide advice and information to managers and employees about the symptoms of menstruation and menopause and how they can best support employees and colleagues who may be experiencing issues at work.
- Allow those experiencing symptoms to discuss these openly, if this is their preference, and ask for support / reasonable adjustments in order to sustain their attendance and performance at work.
- Recognise that menstruation and / or menopause is an individual experience and that people can be affected in different ways and to differing degrees, and therefore, different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed.

## Definitions

**Menopause:** Is a natural stage of life when a person's oestrogen levels decline and they stop having periods. As menopausal symptoms are typically experienced for several years, it is best described as a 'transition' rather than a one-off event. Menopause typically happens between age 45 and 55, but for some it can be later. 'Perimenopause' is the phase leading up to menopause, when the hormone balance starts to change. During this time a person may start to have menopausal symptoms but is still having periods. It is said that a person has reached menopause when they haven't had a period for a year. The symptoms last on average for four years, but for some can last much longer. An early onset of menopause can result from surgery (for example oophorectomy), illness or treatment (such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy).

Menopause can cause a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms that can last for several years. The majority of menopausal people experience symptoms, but everyone is different and symptoms can fluctuate and be felt to varying degrees. Experiencing any of the typical symptoms can pose a challenge for a person as they go about their daily lives, including at work. Some of the most typical symptoms of menopause include:

- psychological issues such as mood disturbances, anxiety and/or depression, memory loss, panic attacks, loss of confidence and reduced concentration
- hot flashes (brief and sudden surges of heat usually felt in the face, neck and chest)
- sleep disturbance that can make people feel tired and irritable
- night sweats (hot flashes that happen during the night)
- irregular periods and/or periods can become light or heavy
- muscle and joint stiffness, aches and pains
- recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs) including cystitis
- headaches
- weight gain
- palpitations (heartbeats that become more noticeable)
- skin changes (dryness, acne, general itchiness)

Remember: Everyone is different. Symptoms can fluctuate and be felt to varying degrees. The above list is not exhaustive and it is important to note that not everyone will experience symptoms during this time. For those that do, the type, amount and severity of symptoms can vary, ranging from mild to severe. Employees may wish to seek advice from their General Practitioner if their symptoms are having an impact on their daily lives.

Some people may experience an impact on their cognitive functions:

- unable to remember things
- loss of confidence
- inability to readily find the right word to express thoughts
- having thoughts completely disappear mid-sentence

It may temporarily become more difficult for an individual to carry out certain tasks and that performance is affected. These are symptoms that people might not usually be associated with menopause.

Whilst menopause is usually a process involving gradual change, it can sometimes be sudden and acute following serious illness, medication or surgery. People experiencing sudden menopause tend to experience more severe symptoms.

Additionally, people undergoing treatment for conditions such as the following may experience menopausal symptoms whilst receiving treatment:

- Endometriosis (estimated to affect around 1 in 10 of reproductive age)
- Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) (estimated to affect 1 in 5)
- Infertility (affecting around 1 in 7 couples) (common treatment is for example IVF);
- Diabetes (affecting 4% - 9.7% of people in the Nordic region)

Surgical and medical treatments as part of an individual's gender transition can also result in menopause symptoms.

**Menstruation:** also known as a 'period', is the part of the menstrual cycle where bleeding occurs. This can last anytime between 3 and 8 days and usually happens once monthly from puberty until menopause. Changes in body hormone levels before a monthly period can cause physical and emotional changes. Pre-menstrual Syndrome (PMS) is the name given to symptoms experienced in the weeks before a period and at the beginning of a period.

Symptoms of periods can include:

- Abdominal or pelvic cramping
- Lower back pain
- Bloating and sore breasts
- Food cravings
- Mood swings and irritability
- Anxiety
- Trouble sleeping
- Headache and fatigue

Not everyone will experience every symptom or need help or support, however, most women are likely to experience symptoms to some degree.

## Menstruation and Menopause at Greenpeace Nordic

While recognising that it is an individual's personal responsibility for their own health and wellbeing, Greenpeace Nordic is committed to ensuring that any-one experiencing menstruation or menopausal symptoms gets the same support and understanding as if they had any other health issue.

Greenpeace Nordic people can utilise our current sick leave entitlements if they are experiencing symptoms related to menstruation. A heavy period or heavy cramping are valid reasons to utilise our sick leave, and we encourage all Nordic people to be comfortable in reporting menstruation and / or menopause symptoms when informing of sick leave absences. Our flexible working approaches can also enable you to work from home if that is more comfortable during heavy flow days. In all our bathrooms in the workplace we will provide menstrual products and in each office we will provide over the counter analgesics and hot water bottles / hot bags. We also encourage you to block out time in your calendar that is meeting free if this supports you with any PMS symptoms.

Certain aspects of a role or the workplace can represent a barrier for someone experiencing menopausal symptoms. Greenpeace Nordic will put in place reasonable adjustments to alleviate or remove these barriers wherever possible, so that people experiencing symptoms can carry on performing in their role.

Adjustments can be physical, such as providing a fan, but they can also involve changes such as offering a more flexible working arrangement, or support for issues that are more psychological in nature (for example loss of confidence, poor concentration, anxiety, and so on) - this would be on a case by case basis and could for example include something as simple as line manager support (just the raising awareness of issues and gaining that common understanding can help) or it could be as extensive as a referral to our psychological support (as per our contracts in each office).

To start these adjustments it requires a confidential, two-way conversation between the employee and Line Manager, to identify the specific issues that person is experiencing and to identify appropriate adjustments that could be put in place to help ease the impact of their symptoms on their work. If you are not comfortable raising these issues with your Line Manager then please reach out to either a Person of Trust, Staff Representative or any staff member in HR who can support you in the conversation. Symptoms of menopause can fluctuate over time, so it is important to have regular discussions to ensure that the support still meets needs.

At Greenpeace Nordic all managers will:

- Provide opportunities for staff to raise any issues relating to their wellbeing
- Be open to discussing the concern that the employee has about the impact on work as a result of problems with their periods and / or menopause, acknowledging the personal nature of conversations and treating them professionally and confidentially
- Not make any assumptions regarding periods and menopause and ensure they listen to the needs of each individual
- Discuss and agree with the employee how best they can be supported and be prepared to make reasonable adjustments to take account of any symptoms they are experiencing.

Understanding this can be a difficult conversation for some, you can use the following to guide you in your preparation to talk to your manager:

- Keep a symptoms diary noting how your symptoms are affecting you
- Consider what reasonable adjustments may help, bearing in mind the need to be flexible and what is operationally feasible
- Consider what timescale the adjustments are likely to be required for
- Mentally rehearse what you want to say so the words feel and sound natural
- Consider doing a role-play with a trusted colleague if this would be helpful
- Set the time and talk to your manager about their current situation, what's happening and how it's affecting your work
- Consider how your circumstances could be improved and offer your adjustment thoughts e.g. working from home; coming in later if poor sleep is an issue; obtaining a fan or moving closer to a window if suffering from hot flushes.

## Related specific policies and procedures

The relevant Nordic protocols and procedures for implementation of this policy are:

- General sick leave Procedures, Employee Handbook
- Plan for Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (ED&I) in Greenpeace Nordic

Other relevant Nordic policies that relate to this policy include:

- Greenpeace Nordic Policy on Discrimination, Harassment and Victimisation
- Greenpeace Nordic Work Environment Policy
- GP Nordic Diversity, Inclusion & Equity (ED&I) Statement of Purpose

## Validity and revision status

To be reviewed every fifth (5) year, or sooner if appropriate.