

# Menopause matters™

Autumn 2023 £5.99

## Developing power as we age

Why is this important?  
.....

### GETTING MOTIVATED IN MIDLIFE

Tips to help you out  
.....

### HISTAMINE INTOLERANCE & MENOPAUSE

### EMBRACE YOUR INNER WARRIOR

If you're angrier than you used to be we explore how you can harness that menopausal rage

### How did women cope in the past?

How a heroine from history reframed herself and can still provide inspiration 10 centuries later  
.....

*Sleep well to live well?*

*OR*

*Live well to sleep?*



**NOW A 116 PAGE ISSUE!**

### NEUROSCIENCE COACHING

What's this all about?  
.....

### Our

**MENOPAUSE**  
Women share their stories  
.....

### BMS CONFERENCE REPORT

### THE POWER OF THE BREATH

Breathing practices done correctly can build up a well of vitality for now and later in life

### + PLUS...

Develop A Mellow Mind For Autumn  
Dr Currie's Casebook  
HRT Supply Update  
Food choices  
and much more...



# Redefining menopause support in the workplace



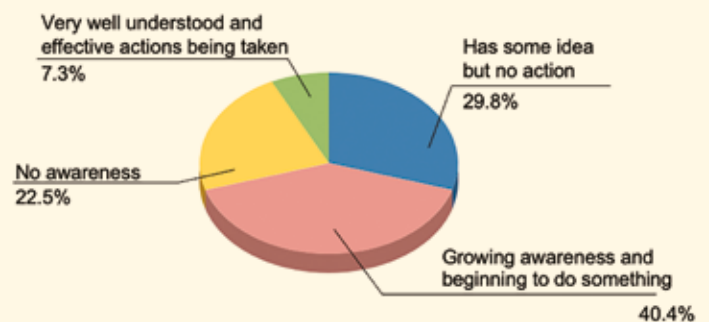
**Menopause contributes to the second biggest loss of female talent in organizations (after maternity leave), creating fractured careers and fewer female leaders. With this in mind, authors Reena Dayal and Pete Sawyer wanted to know what more organizations could do to support menopausal women.**

**M**ore than 350 women from different working sectors responded to our anonymous survey. Most, as one would expect, were in their forties and fifties. We also ran three focus groups and presented our findings to the British Menopause Society's 32nd Annual Scientific Conference 2023.

Our survey backs up conclusions from a 2019 study by BUPA and the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) that three in five women going through menopause were negatively affected at work. That same study found that almost 900,000 women in the UK had left their jobs because of menopausal symptoms. Women's rights campaigning group The Fawcett Society also estimates that some 10% of women experiencing menopause have left the workforce due to their symptoms.

- Both a previous study and this recent survey found that three in five women going through menopause were negatively affected at work.

*Figure 1*



Some 23% of our own respondents reported there was no awareness in their organizations about menopause, 30% said their employers had some idea but have taken no action. And only 7% felt there was a high degree of awareness and support. However, underneath these dry statistics there are human stories. Many of our respondents expressed feelings of hopelessness and anguish, as the following quotes illustrate: →



*"My menopause has changed my life. It's not pleasant and I struggle every day. I was the life of the party. I am a happy-go-lucky person, but I am utterly exhausted with the struggle and [there's] no help for me. At times I have thought about killing myself as no one is interested in a nagging, aching and tired woman."*

*"I ended up leaving my last position after a period of long-term illness due to stress, anxiety and depression with added brain-fog and fatigue. At the time it was determined to be work-related stress, but I still believe that perimenopause was the prime cause."*

*"I was in a very dark place, and I am still struggling to get my symptoms under control and get the right help and medication. I do not feel I am able to work as I feel now."*

*"I've left employment now, but found women colleagues knew nothing and weren't keen on talking about it, men knew nothing, and thought was another thing to laugh at women about. I realized I was starting the menopause around 48, but my doctor dismissed it. It took another 4 years, at which point I was on the verge of suicide."*

*"I had no idea the impact perimenopause and menopause can have prior to experiencing it. It can make you feel like you have lost yourself. I just haven't felt like me. I think it still isn't understood or taken seriously enough. To a certain extent, women are just expected to get on with it."*

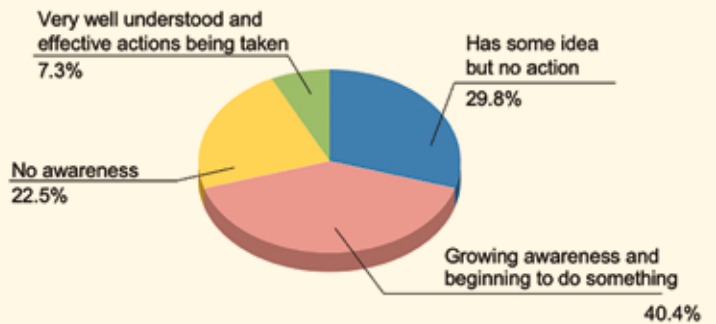
*"It's taken an awful lot of effort to obtain medication to help me. I've literally had a breakdown and had to quit my job before I received any assistance."*

*"I am 50 years old and feel utterly worthless. Having ADHD as well as going through perimenopause (with next to no support from [my] GP and absolutely zero support from my husband) is proving hugely debilitating. I've had to resign from my job and feel bereft without a main job."*

In our survey, 80% reported that the disruption caused by menopause was in the 'survival/burnout zone' and 'significant' categories.

Unsurprisingly, more than half of our respondents felt that men were causal and unsupportive. Often men are

**Figure 2**



aware of menopause but have no idea how to help – 41% of our respondents felt men sat in this category.

One respondent noted: "I work in a very male dominated industry, and despite the company running line manager sessions [for menopause awareness], the take-up is extremely poor from males. This is what my company needs to change."

However, just 4% of our respondents said their line managers were fully trained and equipped to support women in menopause. It is easy to assume that this because most of them are men, but our focus groups suggested that women managers could be equally dismissive and unsupportive.

One respondent from the private sector told us: "The bullying I received made me more unwell to the point I had to leave work. I work in an environment that employs a lot of women, and most women, even ones who had gone through the menopause, were not sympathetic, and thought I was making up how I was experiencing menopause."

Some 89% of our respondents said organizations should support and empower menopausal women; 64%

**Figure 3**

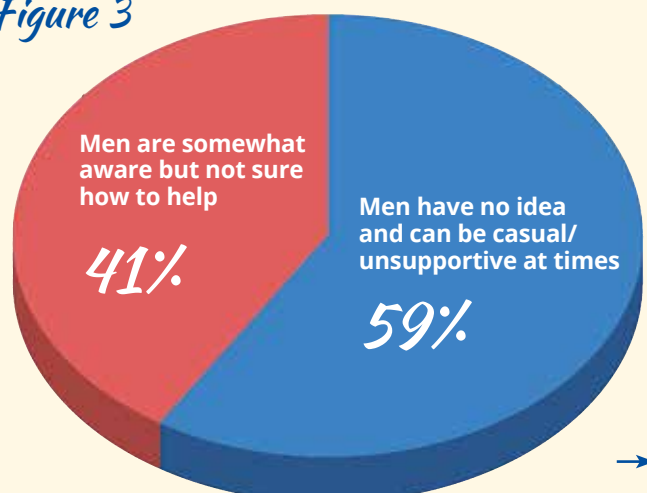




Figure 4



agreed menopause could be an opportunity to redefine life and career goals; but only 5% of our respondents felt that women fully understood menopause and knew how to mitigate the disruption it causes and effectively ask for support.

These outcomes can be changed for the better, and this begins by giving women the right information. A lack of clarity on what is causing the symptoms, or an intuitive rebellion against the advice one is receiving, can evolve into unhelpful inner dialogue, self-doubt, and lack of

Figure 5

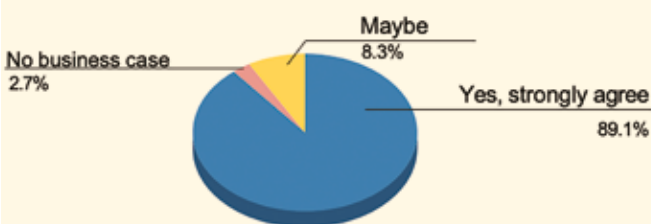


Figure 6

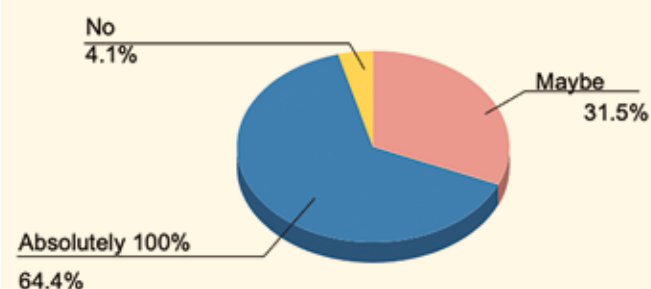
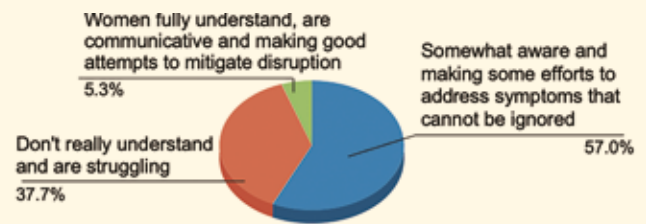


Figure 7



confidence. In essence, it can lead to a state of 'cognitive dissonance', where the mind tries to reconcile two opposing thoughts, often with disastrous consequences.

One way to support is to provide safe spaces for women to talk. We found that when women share their menopause stories in a safe nonjudgmental environment it empowers them. They can release highly emotional and painful experiences which are infused with rejection, shame, frustration, and despondency.

One of our focus groups members reminded us of the power of sharing and being heard as she exclaimed, "I am not going mad! Others feel this too!"

However, the heart of the matter lies in an understanding of the hormonal changes and the ripple effects they have on mental agility, emotional resilience, focus, decision making and confidence, key skills required to succeed at career inflection points. Menopause, because of its disruptive and challenging nature, takes women out of their normal comfort zone.

A woman's cognitive self-awareness of her fight-flight-freeze state of mind, her primary subconscious responses, and the resulting impact on her stress levels (adrenalin and cortisol), will enable her to feel more in control as she understands how the brain's operating principles work, and how these are involuntarily being triggered due to the bio-chemical changes in her body.

In addition, access to good medical information is paramount. Many respondents expressed their dissatisfaction and frustration with the NHS, and in particular their GP.

One public sector worker in her sixties said: "Problems began when I could no longer take HRT for health reasons and subsequent lack of support from NHS and specialist advice, i.e., fourteen months wait for a menopause clinic appointment and lack of specialist knowledge in GP surgery and/or unable to get GP face-to-face appointments."

Another private sector worker said: "My GP told me to 'go away, you are too young, come back in six months if you feel the same.'





A public sector worker in her sixties said: “My doctor is not an HRT expert and appears to struggle to understand the various treatment options, which has meant further stress and costs in keep swapping treatments. It is low priority to them, and I am made to feel a nuisance.”

Our respondents revealed a lack of assistance from private healthcare organizations.

One respondent stated: “My employee [private healthcare] scheme does not include menopause support (it’s bracketed in with puberty and specifically excluded - which is astonishing). Despite our new (female) MD talking about menopause as an issue in the workplace and being aware of this, the scheme offering has not changed.”

Another woman said: “Employer has no menopause policy in place and private health care providers say menopause is not a condition but normal ageing.”

In theory, the Government is taking steps to address these concerns, through practical recommendations set out by the British Standards Institute (“BS 30416”), and with the appointment of Helen Tomlinson as the Menopause Employment Champion. This could make a big difference.

One business owner said: “Even with HRT, I and many women have a daily struggle that isn’t viewed sympathetically by employers. I believe the law needs to change to protect employees and ensure employers take menopause seriously, so they educate themselves to their employees’ needs and support them better.”

Another public sector worker said: “Menopause can be so debilitating and misunderstood. Stress is higher due to unstable hormones. Businesses need clarification and guidelines to regulate and structure how they deal with it.”

Much excellent menopause care and support is provided throughout the UK by the NHS and in workplaces, and it is well known that any survey can be prone to bias, in that people who have had poor experiences may be more likely to complete such a survey. However, accepting the limitations of our survey, the findings gave us clear indications on the aspects of life that get impacted the most by menopause, with physical well-being, emotional resilience, mental agility, quality of relationships, and work productivity, prominent in the list. This does not take into consideration the many attendant health complications which were also contained in our comments.

We see clear opportunities for women in menopause to enhance their personal tool kit, to adapt, flex in the moment, and make powerful choices to minimize disruption to their lives and careers, and create new openings for personal growth. We hope organizations will seize the opportunities that are hidden in plain sight.

**Reena Dayal** is an author, speaker and executive coach specialising in applied neuroscience and transformational leadership. She brings to her clients a rich blend of insights from her 22+ years multi sector global corporate HR experience and 10+ yrs as an entrepreneur.



In 2022 she launched The Butterfly Movement, an initiative aimed to change the narrative on menopausal support and empower women to transform their menopausal journey. Women, HR & DEI experts and anyone who is interested on this topic can register for the free four-part series The Wise Woman by scanning the QR code to the right.



**Pete Sawyer** is an author, journalist, photographer, and psychotherapist in training. His work focuses on human rights, international relations, sociology, and the psychology of the individual. He has over 30 years experience.

