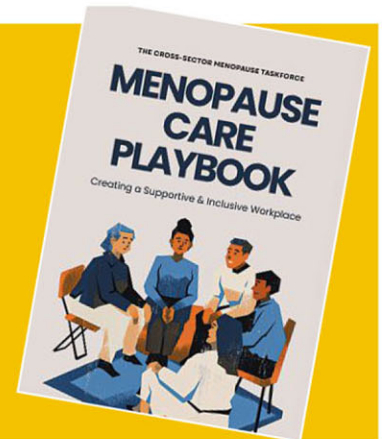


Menopause matters in the workplace

New playbook helps companies create a supportive office culture



Stephanie Yeo
Senior Correspondent

How do you start a conversation about perimenopause in the workplace, an environment where women may be afraid to speak up because they worry about how it will affect their jobs?

A new menopause care playbook launched on Sept 15 provides employers and working women with the knowledge and tools to do that.

Menopause marks 12 consecutive months without a period. Women in Singapore reach this milestone typically between 45 and 55 years old when many are at their career peak.

Perimenopause, the years leading up to menopause, can be a challenging time with a litany of symptoms including joint pain, sleep problems, and physical and mental exhaustion. Perimenopause can last up to a decade.

Titled Menopause Care Playbook: Creating A Supportive & Inclusive Workplace, the 44-page guide is free to download at str.sg/gSi8.

It contains evidence-based information on the menopause transition and resources available in Singapore, as well as practical tips for managers on recognising symptoms and initiating conversations with their colleagues.

There are also suggestions for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which lack dedicated human resource (HR) teams or a well-being infrastructure, as well as case studies of how three different organisations supported their staff.

The playbook's creation comes at a time when menopause's economic impact is being recognised.

On Sept 7, the Geneva-based International Organization for Standardization launched ISO 45010 – Occupational Health and Safety Management – Menstruation and Menopause in the Workplace – Guidance.

It is the world's first International Standard outlining how organisations can better support employees with menstruation and menopause issues, and is available at no cost to maximise adoption.

BRIDGING THE WORKPLACE MENOPAUSE GAP

The Singapore menopause playbook builds on research in March 2025 by the NUS Bia-Echo Asia Centre for Reproductive Longevity and Equality (ACRLE) and femtech start-up HeyVenus Integrated Healthscience.

ACRLE is a faculty research centre under the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine working on extending women's reproductive healthspan.

The 2025 white paper showed that menopause is a workplace and economic issue, not just a women's health issue. The researchers surveyed 1,741 working women aged 20 to 60 in Singapore, Vietnam, Australia, Japan and Indonesia.

One of its most significant find-



The office is the last place women go to for information on perimenopause symptoms, but you can find out more about the menopause transition by getting a free download of the new 44-page Menopause Care Playbook (above). PHOTOS: ADOBE STOCK, COURTESY OF SABARIAH ARIS, THE CROSS-SECTOR MENOPAUSE TASKFORCE

ings was that almost three in four female employees in Singapore aged 45 and up experienced two or more menopause-related symptoms that interfered with their ability to do their jobs and diminished their quality of life.

Realising that most companies have no menopause policies, ACRLE and HeyVenus formed a Cross-Sector Menopause Taskforce, a not-for-profit group consisting of public and private health-care organisations, non-governmental organisations and corporations.

The task force hopes to raise menopause-related awareness and inclusion in Singapore and the Asia-Pacific region.

Sharing new findings from its 2025 survey, the ACRLE says the workplace is the last place Singapore women go to for information related to perimenopause and menopause (20.8 per cent).

A majority (70 per cent) rely on the internet, followed by family and friends, and then doctors.

Asked what they wished their employers would do to support them, survey participants listed suggestions like company insurance coverage for menopause treatments, normalising conversations on the topic and providing flexible working arrangements.

Almost a third (32 per cent) were unaware of local clinics or resources that provide menopause-focused support. Half (49 per cent) do not believe in the effectiveness of menopause hormone treatment – the new name for hormone replacement treatment – or are unsure about it.

Yet, it makes a huge difference when they do find help. Eight in 10 women reported that their perso-

nal well-being improved after seeking treatment for their perimenopause symptoms.

Huang Zhongwei, an adjunct assistant professor who is deputy director of ACRLE, says: "The data provides real-world evidence of the heavy toll menopause takes on midlife women's health and its impact on careers and relationships. It reframes menopause not merely as a biological phase, but as a major public health, social and economic consideration."

HELPING MIDLIFE WOMEN SUCCEED

While some employers think they need big budgets or a large HR team to implement menopause-friendly initiatives, HeyVenus founder and chief executive Christina Ang says small steps count.

Singapore College of Insurance (SCI), which has 20 women among its 38 employees, started such an initiative in April after partnering HeyVenus. The not-for-profit professional training and education body for the insurance industry is one of the case studies profiled in the playbook.

Eligible staff can access digital resources on midlife health and well-being, sign up for well-being and longevity sessions, and get gender-specific health screenings. Their privacy is protected since they do not use their work e-mail addresses or staff numbers to register, data is anonymised and enrolment is on an opt-in basis.

More than one third of the women eligible used the programme in the first quarter of its launch, says Shalini Pavithran, the college's chief executive.

Sleep disruption was a common

UNSPOKEN RULE TO BE RESILIENT

You may still look perfectly fine and continue showing up at work and carrying out your responsibilities, while quietly managing substantial discomfort. There is an unspoken expectation that women should simply be resilient and carry on.



SABARIAH ARIS, who works in a non-profit.



theme raised during the in-person sessions, something its management would not have known of using traditional channels. This data will help shape its future human resource initiatives and benefits, she adds.

She thinks smaller organisations have an advantage as they can quickly approve decisions.

"How I looked at it was that SCI is a small organisation, so we will not be able to solve this with a large budget. What we chose to do was decide that it mattered, and then build it so that the people using it never have to explain themselves to us," she says.

For employees like Sabariah Aris, 47, who works in a non-profit, a menopause-friendly workplace means being able to raise issues of well-being without being judged or perceived as less capable.

In 2025, she experienced brain fog, constant fatigue and low energy even with adequate sleep, making it difficult for her to concentrate on her work as head of a department with multiple work-streams.

She says she had to work harder to remain on top of things while feeling anxious about why she was not her usual high-functioning self.

"You may still look perfectly fine and continue showing up at work and carrying out your responsibilities, while quietly managing substantial discomfort. There is an unspoken expectation that women should simply be resilient and carry on," she says.

She sought medical advice after realising she might be in perimenopause, but the supplements recommended did not resolve all her symptoms.

Since her company had a compassionate work culture, Sabariah felt safe raising the fact that her symptoms sometimes affected her work. She asked her supervisor for greater flexibility and got it, as long as her work deliverables were not affected.

"Being able to adjust on more difficult days allowed me to continue contributing effectively while managing the symptoms. Just as importantly, I did not have the added pressure of having to hide what I was going through or pretend everything was fine," she says.

She says line managers and HR departments have important, complementary roles in supporting women through perimenopause.

Line managers are often the first point of contact when a woman's symptoms begin affecting her day-to-day work. HR, meanwhile, can help build awareness, train managers to handle such conversations and ensure that flexible work and well-being arrangements are accessible.

She says organisations do not necessarily need a special policy for every situation.

Instead, it is more important to create a culture where employees feel psychologically safe to raise challenges and where managers and HR respond with appropriate flexibility, while maintaining clear expectations around their staff members' performance and responsibilities.

"Ultimately, supporting women through perimenopause is not about lowering expectations or standards. It is about creating the conditions for women to continue performing at their best," she says.

stephyeo@sph.com.sg