

Aster Group Case Study

How did you start the menopause conversation?

At Aster we know one of our key strengths are our people and this includes playing a role in recognising the importance of good mental health.

In 2018 we signed an employer pledge with Time to Change cementing our commitment to change the way we think and act about mental health. Creating an environment where we can also talk about menopause openly seemed a natural next step.

We set up a focus group and held our first scoping meeting in September 2018 with Julie. Attendees included some of our mental health first aiders who were experiencing symptoms and keen to share their experiences and learn how they could support other staff members. Out of that meeting we recruited 10 menopause leads who would go on to form our Menopause Action Group & Support fondly known internally as MAGS.

We wanted to make a difference quickly and one of the first simple steps we took was to introduce sanitary 'honesty box' provisions in all our office bathrooms.

World Menopause Day 2018 marked the soft launch of our menopause initiative with a blog in our weekly newsletter announcing Menopause as our new Wellbeing Priority.

Our next step was to offer training for members of MAGS and in December 2018 Julie delivered a session for our menopause leads to help them:

- Understand menopause and the range of options for managing symptoms.
- Define their roles, responsibilities and boundaries.
- Identify best practice workplace solutions and reasonable adjustments to enable confident signposting and support.

What training and awareness have you offered to open up the menopause conversation to all your people at Aster?

We recognise it's not just 'women of a certain age' that can be affected by the menopause, it's the support network around them, from partners to line managers.

Our Menopause at Work guidance document serves to inform all of our people of Aster's approach to menopause and links in with other company policies and guidelines such as:

- Flexible working
- Stress at work policy
- Wellbeing Framework
- Sickness absence management policy
- Take as much leave as you need initiative

In partnership with Julie, we've also created an online training module for Line Managers to ensure they are well placed to recognise menopause symptoms and offer the appropriate support.

This year we're running a series of workshops across all our sites. These include:

- Colleague awareness sessions to promote an environment normalising menopause.
- Line manager training diving into the business case and exploring reasonable adjustments.
- Advice for female colleagues on managing symptoms like hot flushes, poor sleep, brain fog and anxiety.

We recognise menopause is a sensitive and sometimes uncomfortable topic and so have put up awareness posters in the bathrooms where they can be read privately. Internally we're calling this campaign #loonews !

How did your employees respond?

'It's not just the physical symptoms, it's the effect on your mental health. This can cause the greatest challenge in the workplace'

Feedback from the workshops has demonstrated how valuable providing safe forums to talk about this topic has been. Feelings about menopause amongst staff have gone from "panic", "anxious" and "uninformed" to "hopeful", "informed" and "in control".

Our managers are now far more confident with regards to reviewing working conditions and discussing the reasonable adjustments that will enable team members to continue to perform well through menopause.

What would you say to other organisations who currently do not have a support system in place with regards to menopause?

Aster's commitment was recently recognised by the UK & European Employment Engagement Awards when we were announced as a finalist in the Employee Wellbeing category, alongside the likes of Visa, RBS and the NHS.

When you provide the tools, training and information to support wellbeing both your people and your organisation benefit.