Puzzled By Pensions?
Could The Menopause Be Impacting Your Pension?

Guidance for Usdaw members

USDAW PENSIONS

The Issue

For many women, working whilst going through the menopause can be a difficult and stressful time. Research by Wales TUC found that 8 out of 10 women said their menopause symptoms had a significant impact on them at work.

For many Usdaw members, work can make already difficult symptoms harder to deal with. Uncomfortable uniforms, lack of fresh air, working in customer facing roles, and late-night or early-morning shifts are just some of the ways in which work can make menopause symptoms worse.

Some women feel they have no option but to give up their jobs or take early retirement because of menopausal symptoms. This can seem like the only option.

But giving up work or reducing the hours you work will undoubtedly have a financial impact, not only as your income reduces or stops, but in turn, this will also have a knock-on effect with reduced pension pots. This leaflet aims to address this.

People over 50 now make up just under 1/3 of the working population.

Usdaw's Campaigns

Usdaw has been campaigning for better support and more transparency about the menopause at work for a number of years.

Usdaw believes it is time we stopped dismissing the menopause as a personal health issue and start recognising it for what it is – a legitimate occupational health and safety issue and a workplace concern that involves physical and emotional changes that many women find difficult and exhausting.

Usdaw has had considerable success negotiating workplace policies with some of the bigger employers with whom we have recognition agreements. These policies aim to better support women working through the menopause. Check your staff handbook, your Company online staff 'portal' or speak to your Usdaw rep to find out whether your employer has a workplace policy or guide on the menopause.

Almost 1 million women have left work due to menopausal symptoms.

If the workplace is making your menopause symptoms worse, or your symptoms are making it difficult for you to function at work, then please approach your Usdaw rep or local office for support. Usually the support women need at work to manage their symptoms isn't costly or disruptive and it is relatively easy for managers to make changes.

This leaflet has been designed to enable members to better understand the financial impact of the choices they make during the menopause years and what more support women in Usdaw might need at this time.

For more general information about your rights at work, see Usdaw's leaflet *Menopause Guide for Reps (Leaflet 454)* at: **www.usdaw.org.uk/454**

Know Your Pension Rights

If you are struggling with menopausal symptoms, it can be a lonely, confusing and worrying time and the more information you have about your finances, the more in control you will feel. It is important that you can make informed decisions that could impact on your future.

If you don't know where to start, Usdaw can help. We have a number of pension guides and fact sheets to help you and we have summarised some information below which might be of some help.

Are You Paying Enough Into Your Pension?

Most employers nowadays offer a Defined Contribution (DC) pension arrangement. A good outcome at retirement will depend on many things, but the main factors influencing the size of your pot will be the amount of contributions paid in by you and your employer, and the younger you can start to pay in to a pension, the better it will be.

If you are eligible to join a scheme, employers must automatically enrol you into their workplace arrangement but often choose to put you in the lowest contribution section, which just meets the statutory minimum requirements. However, many larger employers tend to offer a higher contribution if you are also willing to commit to pay more.

If you can afford to pay more in to your pension pot, find out if your employer will also increase their contribution - after all, this is free money that you are potentially missing out on.

Leaving a Pension Scheme

If you leave your employer or stop paying contributions to your pension scheme, you do not lose your pension benefits. Any pension pot which you and your employer have built up remains yours.

Your pension provider should send you a leaver statement within two months of receiving notification of leaving.

If you are a member of a Defined Contribution Scheme, you will also continue to receive a benefit statement every year, which will show you what is currently in your pot and what you might receive at retirement.

Part-Time Working

If you have previously been enrolled into your workplace pension scheme, as long as you still meet the auto-enrolment criteria then your contributions going forward should be based on the reduced salary that has been agreed with your employer. If your salary does reduce, you need to be aware that less will be building up in your pension pot, unless you can afford to increase your rate of contribution. Reducing your hours can sometimes be complicated so, if this is something you are considering, we would strongly recommend you talk to your employer to clarify what will happen to your pension, in order to manage your expectations.

Ill-Health Retirement

If you qualify for an ill-health award, what you will receive will very much depend on the type of pension scheme you are currently contributing to, or have contributed to in the past.

Defined Benefit (DB) pension schemes (also known as Final Salary or CARE arrangements) generally provide you with a regular income, for the duration of your lifetime, if you are forced to retire early due to ill-health.

Defined Contribution (DC) pensions (the newer type of workplace pension schemes) where you build up a pot of money for your retirement, will normally provide you with a lump-sum payment reflecting what has built up in your pension pot.

Your workplace scheme will potentially only pay you an ill-health pension if your condition is permanent and only if your condition will completely stop you from doing your own job, or sometimes, taking on any other job in future.

Every pension scheme has its own Rules and these will set out the criteria for ill-health retirement.

Ill-health pensions can be accessed from any age and this is why the bar is set quite high to qualify. Every scheme will have a formal process to follow if this is something you wish to pursue.

25% of women consider giving up work because of menopausal symptoms.

Early Retirement

You currently have the right to apply for early retirement from age 55 onwards. From 2027, the Minimum Pension Age is set to increase to 57, unless you have a 'protected' Minimum Pension Age in your workplace scheme.

If you have a DB pension, your regular income will normally be reduced for each year that you access your pension before the Scheme's Normal Retirement Date (NRD), which is usually 65.

If you have any DC pensions, your pension pot is not reduced as such; however, as you are accessing your pot early, it will have had less chance of building up and there is a possibility that if you access your pot early, you might run out of money at some point in the future.

Flexible Retirement

In a nutshell, flexible retirement is a lifestyle choice that allows you to slow down a little in your current job before stopping work completely.

Flexible retirement must be agreed with your employer, but it could enable you to change the nature or pattern of your work, which could make a big difference if you are finding things difficult.

Choosing to reduce your working hours or switching to a lower-paid job is likely to reduce your income. However, if you're over 55 (increasing to 57 from 2028), you could use your pension savings to make up some of these reduced earnings. You will need to check with your own employer to see if they have a flexible retirement policy and what terms and conditions they attach to it.

The TUC estimates 70% of British women aged 45-59 currently work, meaning more women than ever are working through the menopause.

You will also need to determine if you have enough pension savings to make flexible retirement practical and bear in mind how potential changes might impact on your tax position.

State Pensions

State pensions are paid entirely separately to any workplace or personal pensions you may have.

Unlike workplace pensions, you cannot access your State Pension early. Everyone's State Pension age depends on when they were born. To check when you will receive your State Pension and what you might get, you can apply for a forecast by visiting the Government's website: **www.gov.uk**

If you would like to speak to someone confidentially on Usdaw's Pensions Section (a female pension adviser is available if preferred), or if you would like more information, please contact us on **0161 224 2804**, email **pensions@usdaw.org.uk** or use the QR code to ask a question via the website.

For more information on pensions visit our website: **www.usdaw.org.uk/pensions**

More Information

Do You Have A Question About Your Pension?

Submit your question online at:
www.usdaw.org.uk/PensionsQ

Scan to ask a question

Usdaw Nationwide

Wherever you work, an Usdaw rep or official (Area Organiser) is not far away. For further information or assistance, contact your Usdaw rep or local Usdaw office. Alternatively, you can phone our Freephone Helpline **0800 030 80 30** to connect you to your regional office or visit our website: **www.usdaw.org.uk**
You can also write to the Union's Head Office. Just write **FREEPOST USDAW** on the envelope and put it in the post.

Join Usdaw

You can join online at:
www.usdaw.org.uk/JoinUs

Scan to join today

What Happens Next

Once we process your application, you will receive a membership card with our Helpline telephone number and a New Member's Pack giving details of all the benefits and professional services available to you.

Lft 455 February 2025
Stock photography, posed by models

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