

Study puts price tag on cost of menopause symptoms for women in the workplace

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Menopause-related symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats, mood changes, sleep disturbances, joint aches and cognitive difficulties damage the quality of life for millions of women. They also can

adversely affect women in the workplace. A newly published Mayo Clinic study puts numbers on that cost: an estimated \$1.8 billion in lost work time and \$28 billion when medical expenses are added, in the U.S. alone.

"The takeaway for employers is that there is a critical need to address this issue for women in the workplace," says lead author Stephanie Faubion, M.D., director of Mayo Clinic Women's Health.

Menopause occurs at a mean age of about 52 years, and given that midlife women make up a sizable proportion of the global workforce, the impact of menopause symptoms on worker absenteeism, productivity, increased direct and indirect medical costs, and lost opportunities for career advancement are significant.

To evaluate the impact of menopause symptoms on women in the workplace, Mayo Clinic researchers invited 32,469 women aged 45 to 60 who are receiving [primary care](#) at Mayo Clinic to participate in a survey study. Just over 5,200 women responded (16.1%) and of those, 4,440 women were currently employed and included in the study.

The findings, published in *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, identified an association between menopause symptoms and adverse work outcomes, including lost work productivity, with the severity of menopause symptoms strongly predicting the odds of an adverse work outcome. According to the Proceedings article, the findings highlight a critical need to improve [medical treatment](#) provided to women and an opportunity to make the workplace environment more supportive for women experiencing menopause symptoms.

"A full 13% of the women we surveyed experienced an adverse work outcome related to menopause symptoms, and about 11% were missing days of work because of these symptoms," Dr. Faubion says. "We also

found some racial and [ethnic differences](#) on a sub-analysis of the results, though more research is needed in this area, in larger and more diverse groups of women."

The survey was conducted from March 1, 2021, through June 30, 2021, and symptoms were assessed by the Menopause Rating Scale (MRS). The mean total MRS score was 12.1, indicating moderate menopause symptom burden. The mean age of the 4,440 participants was 53.9 years, with the majority being white (93%), married (76.5%) and educated (59.3% with college degree or more).

A total of 597 women (13.4%) reported at least one adverse work outcome due to menopause symptoms, and 485 women reported missing one or more days of work in the preceding year due to symptoms.

"Adding to the complexity of women's experience of menopause is that the topic has been taboo, particularly in the workplace, which potentially adds to the psychological burden of symptoms," says senior author Ekta Kapoor, M.B.B.S., assistant director of Mayo Clinic Women's Health.

"Women often fear bias, discrimination and stigmatization, and therefore may be reluctant to disclose their menopause symptoms to their workplace managers and others. Recognizing these concerns and creating a safe workplace environment for women to discuss their health care needs may help address this."

Dr. Faubion and Dr. Kapoor also are co-authors of an article to be published in the May edition of Mayo Clinic Proceedings on the association between migraine and vasomotor symptoms. Vasomotor symptoms, such as hot flashes and night sweats, are a hallmark symptom of menopause and are experienced by a majority of women during the [menopause](#) transition.

"Our research suggests a critical need to address this issue for women in the workplace," Dr. Faubion says. "Clinicians need to ask women about [menopause symptoms](#) and offer guidance and treatment, and employers need to create and implement [workplace](#) strategies and policies to help women navigate this universal life transition."

More information: Stephanie S. Faubion et al, Impact of Menopause Symptoms on Women in the Workplace, *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.mayocp.2023.02.025](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mayocp.2023.02.025)

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