



Navigating Menopause for Dentists and Team Members

The dental profession is steadily approaching gender parity, with women now accounting for the majority of students enrolled in and graduating from dental schools across Canada. Women also comprise about 98% of the dental hygienist and 99% of dental assistant workforce in this country. However, the impact of menopause on women working in the dental profession is relatively understudied and misunderstood, and the subject is still somewhat stigmatized.

This article aims to raise awareness in the dental community about the realities menopausal women encounter in the workplace and to provide dentists and dental team members with ways to support their colleagues during this stage of life.

Women’s lives are marked by many physiological milestones. Hormonal changes can have a major impact on body and soul, and menopause is one of these natural phases. As women transition through this biological process, they may experience physical and emotional changes that can impact various aspects of their lives, including their professional life.

A range of symptoms may appear in menopause, such as excessive perspiration, irritability, weight fluctuation, fatigue, difficulty falling asleep, hot flashes, mood swings or low morale. A better understanding of these factors can help women handle them more effectively, and to arm themselves with coping mechanisms to accompany them through these changes.



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Female dentists and team members at the dental office are not exempt from the physical and emotional changes associated with this life transition. Creating a supportive and empathetic environment at the dental office for those going through menopause is crucial for ensuring their well-being and maintaining a positive workplace culture.

Making some small adjustments and implementing a few measures can help make the workplace more amenable, to allow female team members to perform effectively and stay in the dental workforce for a longer period of time.



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Education, Communication and Culture

Although menopause is a natural part of a woman’s life, it is sometimes considered a taboo subject to talk about. Providing education about menopause for both men and women in the dental office can enhance understanding and empathy. Training programs or workshops can cover the specific challenges that female dentists may face during menopause, including how these symptoms might impact their performance at work. Educating the entire dental team ensures a better understanding of the unique needs of female dentists during this life transition.

Fostering open communication about menopause helps to break down the stigma surrounding it. By normalizing such discussions, women may feel more comfortable sharing their experiences and needs with colleagues and supervisors. Creating a culture that acknowledges menopause as a natural part of life helps dispel myths and fosters a supportive atmosphere.

“Menopause is an inevitable milestone that every woman will experience. It unfolds in midlife, whether she is at the peak of her career or stepping into a new chapter. And she navigates while she continues to lead, create, care, and contribute,” says Dr. Seema Agarwal, associate dentist at Dentistry at the Mill in Brampton, Ontario, and an emerging speaker about researching the effects of menopause on the oral cavity.

Menopausal symptoms can vary widely among women and what truly transforms a workplace culture is the presence of psychological safety—spaces where women feel heard without judgment and supported without pressure to disclose more than they wish.

“A safe space is not necessarily having a formal staff meeting on the subject of menopause,” says Dr. Agarwal. “It’s knowing that if someone needs to say, ‘I didn’t sleep at all last night,’ or ‘I’m not myself this week, it will be received by the dentist and colleagues with understanding, not skepticism” she says. A workplace culture of attentiveness, where colleagues notice changes and respond with empathy, strengthens the entire team.

The Fundamental Role of Office Managers and Leadership

Workplace safety can be significantly influenced by the actions and attitudes of office managers and practice leaders. Policies alone are not enough; tone and responsiveness also have an impact. Office managers are fundamental to this process, as they are often the first to notice subtle changes in a team member’s scheduling needs, energy or stress levels. Their initial response to these variations can either create a sense of safety or lead to silence.

“When a manager says, ‘Let’s see how we can adjust this,’ instead of ‘This is just how it is,’ it can have a profound effect,” says Dr. Agarwal.

Office managers can make some practical adjustments such as offering shift flexibility, temperature control, uniform alternatives, and private break spaces. These can also help foster a feeling of trust among the dental team. “Knowing that your leadership sees you as a whole person, not just a part of the dental team, helps to create loyalty and longevity,” adds Dr. Agarwal.

By cultivating respectful dialogue, encouraging peer support, and modeling empathy, managers help ensure that discussions about menopause can take place with dignity.



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Workplace Adjustments That Matter

Menopausal symptoms can vary widely. Hot flashes are not merely uncomfortable because of the heat sensation; they can sometimes cause significant perspiration. For dental professionals working in close proximity to patients and colleagues, this can lead to self-consciousness and anxiety about body odour.

Insomnia is another common symptom of menopause. Poor sleep can impair concentration, increase irritability, and reduce resilience. Women frequently open up to each other about feelings of low mood, and at times, episodes of having a panic attack.

Flexible work arrangements, such as adjusted schedules, later start times after sleepless nights, or shift modifications, can provide meaningful relief, if these are operationally feasible.

Team uniform design is another consideration. Ones that are lightweight and made of breathable fabrics may

offer greater comfort to your team members. Providing alternatives to trousers and reconsidering white uniforms during unpredictable perimenopausal cycles can reduce unnecessary stress.

Office climate and environmental adjustments such as improved ventilation, access to fans or air conditioning, and private spaces for short restorative breaks significantly enhance comfort.

Changes to Implement in Your Dental Practice to Help Team Members Navigate Menopause

- Magnifying glass at medication stations
- No-interruption zones for medication areas
- Visual and written checklists
- Morning coverage review meetings
- Detailed cupboard organization
- Individual desk fans
- Cooling cloths in the fridge
- Hydration reminder signs
- Hygiene products in washroom
- Warm lighting in staff room
- Blue-light filters and anti-glare screens
- Reset zone near a window
- Shoe allowance in uniform budget
- Digital task lists per appointment

The Importance of “Building Your Village”

“A professional woman wears many hats. Beyond being clinicians, mothers, daughters, wives, many are business owners,” says Dr. Agarwal. “Just as we are experts of the oral cavity and yet we continue to take CE courses to stay current clinically, there are other courses and experts in related fields that can help support women team members through menopause. Be sure to build that village as well,” she adds.

She shares a significant realization about the importance of having a village after an unexpected foot surgery: “I came to understand then that just as I depended on crutches for physical aid, there were occasions when I needed comparable support systems in my life,” she says.

Dr. Agarwal’s personal “physiology village” now includes a multidisciplinary support team. Sleep, balanced nutrition, exercise, yoga, meditation and breathwork are central to her resilience.

“Parts of me are the same and parts of me are very different. Therefore, things have changed. But a book with only one chapter repeated over and over would be very boring. Menopause should not be seen as a decline; rather it is an evolution,” says Dr. Agarwal.

Many women today are balancing menopause with active parenting and caregiving responsibilities. Formal and informal support helps determine whether women recalibrate or withdraw.

A workplace that fosters understanding and openness must always be balanced with respect for individual choice. How much a woman team member reveals are part of how she is handling her menopause journey. Some women find such open dialogue liberating while others prefer discretion. A supportive workplace allows for both.

Prioritizing the health and wellness of female dentists and team members strengthens the profession. By fostering safe spaces, encouraging open yet respectful dialogue, empowering office managers, supporting women’s peer groups, and promoting the intentional building of personal “physiology villages,” dental workplaces can ensure that experienced professionals remain engaged, confident and valued.



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