



MENSTRUATION IN THE WORKPLACE

MANAGER INFORMATION PACK



DISCLAIMER

Everyone's experience of menstruation is different. People may be experiencing different symptoms and different medical conditions. This workbook provides knowledge and understanding around why we need to support menstruation and menstrual health at work and the important role that managers play.

People of diverse gender expressions and identities experience menopause, and although we may use the terms 'women' 'female' 'her' when quoting specific research, our resources are focused on how everyone can be supported.

Disclaimer: The information, including but not limited to, text, graphics, images and other material contained in this workbook are for informational purposes only. No material is intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of a qualified healthcare provider with any questions you may have regarding any medical condition or treatment and before undertaking a new health care regime.



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INTRODUCTION



Everyone's experience of menstruation and menstrual health is different. People may be experiencing different symptoms and different medical conditions. As managers it is important to have this understanding and as you will learn the experience can be really very different from one person to the next.

Offering support to colleagues with menstruation-related symptoms that are impacting on their work will help you to:

- improve your team's morale
- retain valuable skills and talent
- reduce sickness absence.

This workbook provides knowledge and understanding around menstruation and menstrual health and the important role you play as a manager.

Your role as a manager in supporting those experiencing symptoms relating to menstruation and menstrual health is *crucial.*

WHY IT'S URGENT AND IMPORTANT

DEMOGRAPHIC CASE

According to the ONS almost 11 million women who menstruate are in work and there will be more who were assigned female at birth – when you look at these statistics it highlights this isn't something we can ignore at work:

c70%

experience menstrual symptoms

c30%

20-40% experience PMS

1 in 4

experience heavy menstrual bleeding

2 in 3

get fibroids

1 in 10

are affected by endometriosis

1 in 10

are affected by PCOS

EQUALITY ACT

2010

LEGAL CASE

Period pain and the menstrual health conditions are not specifically protected under the Equality Act 2010. If, however, an employee is treated unfairly because of these conditions, it may amount to discrimination under the protected characteristics of sex or disability.

WHY IT'S URGENT AND IMPORTANT

BUSINESS CASE

Boost productivity

Symptoms can negatively impact work performance, with stigma of taking time off due to PMS causing women to lose 8.4 days of work every year due to lower productivity.

Raising awareness and introducing support can help colleagues to thrive, boosting productivity.

8.4

DAYS PER YEAR

lost productivity

13.8%

REPORT ABSENCE

during their period

Reduce absenteeism

Putting the right support in place can help to lower menstrual-related absences.

Key for businesses, as a total of 13.8% of all women reported absenteeism during their periods and the average period-related absenteeism is 1.3 days per year.

Attract & retain talent

Being a forward-thinking employer who makes menstrual health part of an everyday workplace conversation can attract talent into your organisation, as well as helping you to retain valuable employees.

63% of workers think that employers should normalise the conversation around periods in the workplace and 59% say that they should provide more information to all employees.

63%

OF WORKERS

say employers should normalise the conversation

WHY IT'S URGENT AND IMPORTANT

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY CASE

Demonstrate your commitment to being a *responsible employer*

Putting in place a strong wellbeing programme which supports all your employees is simply the right thing to do.

87% of people who menstruate say they have experienced stress or anxiety in the workplace because of their period. Offering support, raising awareness and normalising the conversation can make sure you provide a supportive and inclusive working environment to all employees.

87%

EXPERIENCE STRESS
OR ANXIETY

at work due to
their period

50%



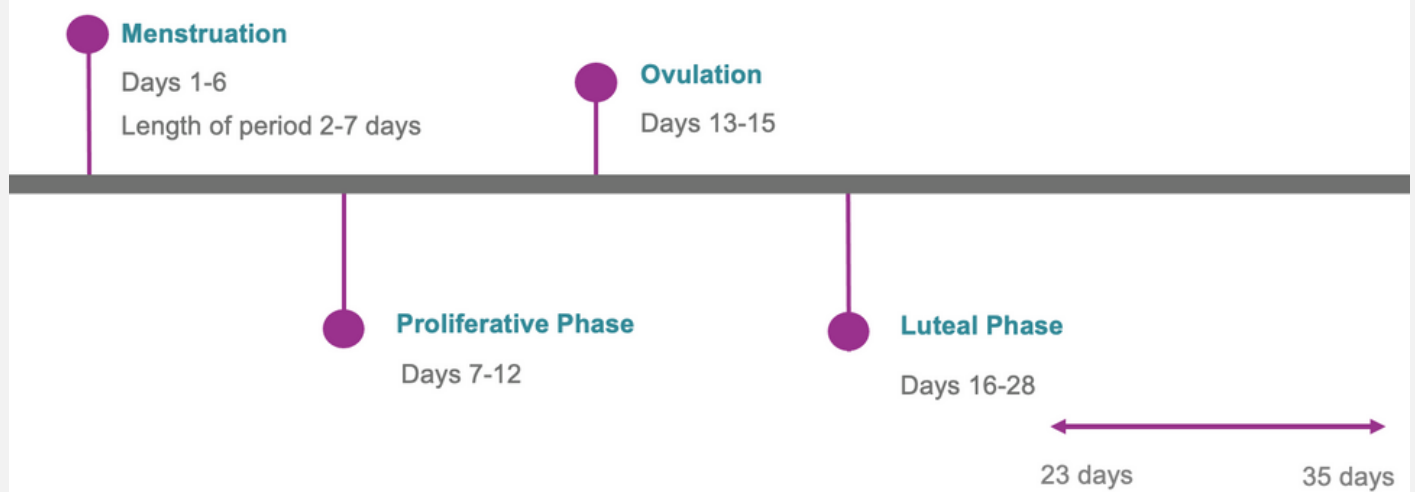
Say there is a noticeable
stigma at work

MENSTRUATION: THE FACTS

To begin to understand the potential experiences of menstruation, it is useful to understand a “typical” menstrual cycle. We say typical – it's important to remember that everyone is different and cycle times can be shorter or longer for different people.

As you will see hormone levels change during the monthly cycle but in general that will follow a regular pattern for each person (unless they are experiencing an underlying health condition which is affecting the regularity of their cycle). As someone reaches perimenopause this is where hormones can go a bit crazy with often huge fluctuations, especially oestrogen which can lead to irregular cycles and many different menopause symptoms. For more information on menopause go to our [Menopause Hub](#).

Typical menstrual cycle



MENSTRUATION: THE FACTS

PREMENSTRUAL SYMPTOMS

Hormonal changes can result in a wide range of symptoms, both physical and psychological. Typical symptoms may include:

- Mood swings
- Feeling down or anxious
- Feeling irritable
- Feeling bloated
- Headaches
- Breast tenderness or changes
- Loss of interest in sex
- Changes in skin (like spots or dryness)
- Changes in appetite
- Tiredness and/or difficulty sleeping

These symptoms usually improve once a period starts and disappear a few days afterwards. PMS doesn't affect all people who have periods. But some people can experience these symptoms in a severe way that can affect their everyday life.

Menstrual pain can also vary from mild discomfort to severe cramps with a stabbing pain. In the case of debilitating pain, there might be an underlying cause. It's important anyone experiencing this speaks to their doctor if they feel they need help managing symptoms.

MENSTRUAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

It is good to become familiar with conditions that could be affecting people in work. These include:

- Fibroids
- Endometriosis
- Adenomyosis
- PCOS (Polycystic Ovary syndrome)
- PMDD (Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder)

Further information on these conditions can be found in the Menstruation and Menstrual Health Information Pack

SHARED STORIES

The agency uniform was white - I had not long since returned from maternity leave and had PCOS but as agency I had to ask for access to the toilet and locker. I couldn't hold keys - not even for the bathroom. At the time I often "flooded" without warning I spent many shifts standing up, checking the chair and praying I had not had any leaks. The embarrassment of having to ask to access my products that were in my bag in a locked room and then to be escorted to the ladies' bathroom and then back to my bag by male prison officers was a really embarrassing time. I was young and naïve then, there was no flexibility, completely inappropriate uniform and no options for alternatives. I stopped working there due to the difficulties.

My menstruation has always been irregular and going to work was sometimes a challenge, it was a taboo to even talk about! If I were to be absent from work it wasn't taken lightly. I was diagnosed with PCOS - which puts it in to perspective really. I went years without being taken seriously, like I was over exaggerating. Like having a headache wasn't a 'real' reason to call in sick, like sending an email to the wrong person in a lapse of concentration was just me 'not paying attention'. Understanding my body has been challenging as I have grown up, but I feel like I am having to learn it all over again now that I have PCOS. My workplace has been semi-supportive but I still feel ashamed to admit that I am struggling with "being a woman". Women don't listen to their bodies enough. Everything seems so uncertain, all because of menstruation. A woman's life is dictated by their natural body cycles, we shouldn't be made to feel like it's just a period/headache/muscle pain/fatigue.

SUPPORTING MENSTRUATION AND MENSTRUAL HEALTH

People can find it hard to talk to their manager about how menstruation or their menstrual health is affecting them. So how do we go about having these conversations – we need to be led by our colleagues – people will have different levels of comfort talking about this at work. One of the best things you can do to help open up this conversation is let your whole team know you've attended training. This will highlight to the team this is something you're happy to support people on when needed.

- **Opening questions :** If someone asks for a meeting you could open the conversation with *"Is everything ok?" "How can I best help you?"* Or if you see someone is struggling you could ask *"I've noticed a change and I'm concerned, is everything ok?"*
- **Exploring support:** Is there anything at work that increases your symptoms? What can I do to support you?
- **Signposting:** Are you aware of the resources we have to help with your wellbeing? (you may choose to signpost something specific depending on the conversation)
- **Keep the conversation going:** Can we check-in regularly to ensure you're getting the support you need?

Keep reading to understand our top tips for supportive conversations about menstruation and menstrual health at work.



SUPPORTING MENSTRUATION AND MENSTRUAL HEALTH

1

PREPARE FOR YOUR MEETING

Check out what support is available in your organisation. Search your organisation's intranet or if there's nothing there, talk to HR.

2

BOOK A MEETING

Arrange a time to meet, allowing enough time for the conversation. Think about where you are meeting, finding a room which will allow the conversation to be confidential.

3

ENCOURAGE THEM TO BE OPEN AND HONEST

Understand how their symptoms are affecting them at work, what is getting in the way of them being their best at work and what you as their line manager could do to help. Discuss what the support they would like e.g. reasonable adjustments and timescales. Or sometimes just knowing someone understands and is there to listen can help.

Agree with your colleague what you can both do. If you need to, take time to find out information and seek advice.

4

DO THEY WANT THE MEETING TO BE CONFIDENTIAL?

Some of us are happy talking about menstruation openly, others are not. Talk to your colleague about whether they want the conversation to be kept confidential or if they're happy to discuss it with other colleagues. It's their choice.

5

FOLLOW UP

At the end of the meeting put a time in the diary to meet again, whether that's to agree a way forward, to monitor progress or update. The focus should be on ongoing support.



SUPPORTING MENSTRUATION AND MENSTRUAL HEALTH

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

P**Prepared**

- Be prepared and understand the impact this may have at work
- Consider how to have supportive conversations
- Know what support is available

E**Empathy**

- Understand the potential impact at work
- Actively listen to what someone is experiencing

R**Recognise**

- Recognise when someone is struggling
- You know your team – what's different?

I**Individual**

- Understand that everyone has a unique experience
- Treat everyone as an individual and how you can best support them

O**Offer support**

- Explore together what support would help them
- Signpost support available both within and outside your organisation

D**Destigmatise**

- Be mindful of the language you use around menstruation
- Encourage others to help break down the taboo

SUPPORTING MENSTRUATION AND MENSTRUAL HEALTH

REASONABLE WORKPLACE ADJUSTMENTS

These will be different for everyone, which is why having individual conversations is so important. Appropriate changes can be made on a case-by-case basis by the line manager, thinking about what will support the colleague and the organisational requirements of their role.

Many adjustments will be simple, and may vary in the time they are needed. Make sure you record what you've agreed.



Keep reading
to learn
examples
based on the
symptoms
people often
find challenging
at work...

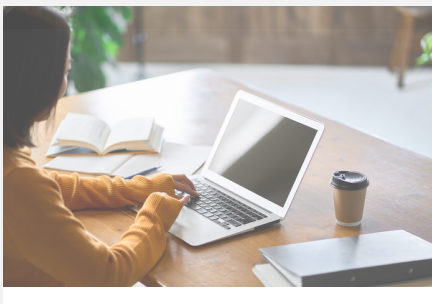
SUPPORTING MENSTRUATION AND MENSTRUAL HEALTH

REASONABLE WORKPLACE ADJUSTMENTS



General adjustments and support

- Where possible, allow for flexible working and/or working from home
- Allow time off for medical appointments
- Regular one-to-one discussions
- Signposting resources for support



Cognitive and/or physical fatigue

- Provide information and instructions in writing, as well as verbally
- Provide access to quiet spaces, either to work or for a time of restoration/recovery
- Provide tools to help employees recall specific tasks or actions
- Manage time effectively by spacing meetings
- Where possible, allow for flexible working and/or working from home



Difficulty focussing or concentrating

Some can experience problems with concentration.

- Consider adjusting working hours to times of the day when concentration is better or adjust working pattern
- Provide notebooks or other memory aids
- Offer a quiet space for work
- Encourage scheduling time to focus

SUPPORTING MENSTRUATION AND MENSTRUAL HEALTH

REASONABLE WORKPLACE ADJUSTMENTS



Feelings of anxiety

- If possible, remove the triggers from the employee's environment
- Provide a quiet rest area
- Allow for flexible working and working from home, where possible
- Have regular one-to-one discussions
- Talking therapies e.g. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy can help
- Refer to the organisation's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or Occupational Health



Irregular or heavy bleeding

- Provide adequate and accessible welfare/toilet facilities and make period products available in all welfare/toilet facilities
- Provide access to showers and the ability to change clothes during working hours
- Allow for flexible working and working from home, where possible
- Provide uniforms in a dark colour
- Provide a locker as a personal storage space
- Manage scheduled meetings to allow comfort breaks

USEFUL RESOURCES

WHERE TO GO FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



National Institute for
Health and Care Excellence

[NICE Guidelines](#)



[Endometriosis UK](#)



[NHS Guidance on
PCOS](#)



[NHS Guidance on
Endometriosis](#)



[NHS Guidance on
Adenomyosis](#)



[NHS Guidance on
PMS and PMDD](#)



[Mind factsheet on
PMDD](#)



[NAPS \(National
Association for
Premenstrual
Syndromes\)](#)

