



Menstrual Health at Work

Fibroids at Work



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What are fibroids?

Fibroids are the most common gynaecological condition, closely followed by endometriosis. Fibroids are non-cancerous growths and are found in or around the womb. The exact cause of fibroids is not fully understood but we do know that there is a link to oestrogen.

Fibroids are more common from puberty up until menopause.

There are different types of fibroids, the names of each depend on where they are in the womb:

Intramural fibroids

These grow inside the muscle layer within the wall of the womb.

Subserosal fibroids

These grow on the outside wall of the womb and into the pelvis.

Submucosal fibroids

These grow on the inner wall of the womb into and the cavity of the womb.

Pedunculated fibroids

When subserosal and submucosal fibroids grow on a stalk.

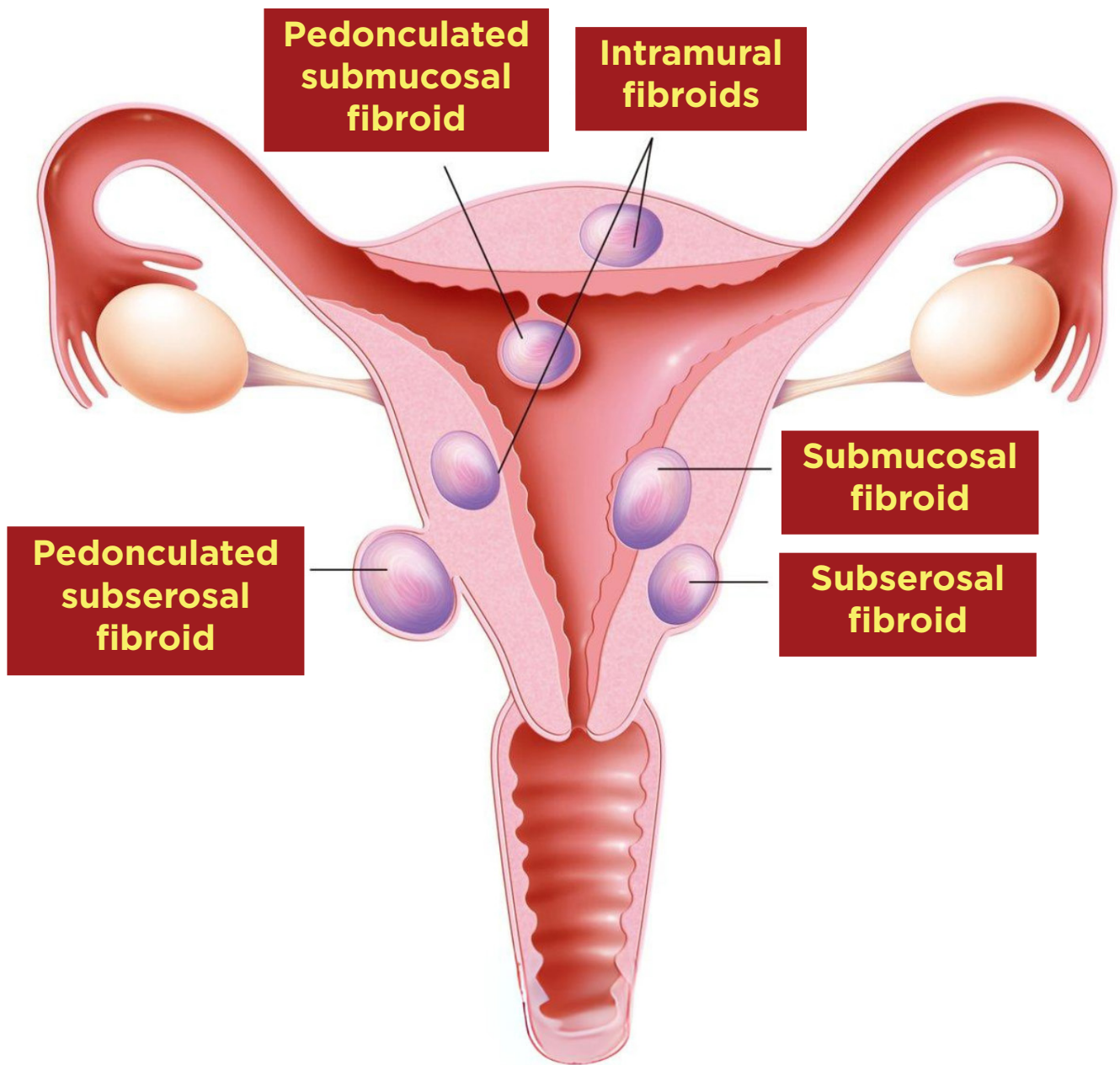


Image source: NHS.UK

Symptoms

Different people may experience different symptoms and some may be unaware that they even have fibroids.

Common symptoms include:

- ➔ Heavy periods
- ➔ Prolonged periods, bleeding that lasts a long time
- ➔ Painful periods
- ➔ Swelling/firmness in your tummy
- ➔ Pain, or pressure in your pelvis or lower back
- ➔ Pain with sex
- ➔ Constipation
- ➔ Needing to pee more often
- ➔ Difficulty getting pregnant

However, with the right treatment, many of these issues can be addressed, and the symptoms of fibroids can be made more manageable and improve quality of life and enable an individual to thrive at work.

As employers it is important to be aware that every individual is different.

Diagnosis and treatment options will not work the same on everyone. Therefore, it is important to understand the impact it has on your staff and be mindful that support will differ for each person.

Workplace testimonial



“My career journey has been unconventional, largely due to health challenges. At 18, I realised that my debilitating menstrual cycles and anaemia would make traditional employment difficult, so I pursued freelancing, fearing that conventional work wouldn’t accommodate my condition.

It wasn’t until 2021, after seeking an iron infusion for my severe symptoms—migraines, dizziness, blurred vision, ringing ears, shortness of breath, fainting, vomiting, and weak limbs — that I was diagnosed with fibroids, finally explaining years of suffering.

Before this diagnosis, I had worked in an office as part of a small team where I was the only woman. My colleagues were very understanding about my low iron levels, and I learned a lot from them about taking better care of my health. I made a conscious effort to increase my iron levels and regularly requested blood tests. However, despite my best efforts, every menstrual cycle would set me back, and the prescribed iron tablets were ineffective. I suffered in silence during my cycles, strategically using my annual leave to rest and recover.

Growing up in the 90s and early 2000s, periods were a taboo subject. Phrases like “Everyone’s period is different” and “Periods are a part of life” implied that life goes on despite menstrual challenges, influencing how I navigated both life and the workplace.

By the time the pandemic hit, I was 31 going on 32, no longer working, and feeling increasingly worse.

At my worst, I struggled to walk more than a few steps without yawning and fainted almost daily. I noticed new symptoms, including back pain and a protruding stomach. Desperate, I went to the hospital for an iron infusion — the only treatment I had been offered before, aside from iron tablets. Over four days, my medical history and symptoms were thoroughly investigated, leading to the diagnosis of fibroids.

I was shocked and upset, realising that I had built my entire life and career around what I thought was iron deficiency when, in reality, I was suffering from a hidden illness. Worse still, my suffering had been normalised.

Joining a support group called The Guidance Suite was a turning point. I learned how to advocate for myself and manage my symptoms with new medications.

The combination of effective medication and the hope of an upcoming procedure made me feel comfortable returning to a traditional 9-to-5 job in 2023.

However, after being coerced into disclosing my condition at a new job, I faced workplace discrimination, forcing me to confront the stigma surrounding women's health.

A good supportive employer in the context of women's health, particularly fibroids should actively promote and implement policies, practices, and a workplace culture that prioritises the wellbeing of female employees.

Employers who embody these characteristics foster a more inclusive, productive, and loyal workforce, these characteristics could be:



Health Benefits

Health insurance coverage

Mental health support



Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexible hours and remote work



Work-Life Balance

Encourages taking time off



Equal Opportunities

Anti-discrimination policies



Leadership and Role Models

Diverse Leadership



Regular Feedback and Improvement

Open communication channels

Continuous improvement

What can you do to support employees with fibroids?

Creating a positive working environment for those with fibroids will help employees thrive at work. **We have listed suggestions below which you can tailor to your workplace and help you support those with fibroids:**

Policies and support

- ➔ Are policies and procedures supportive of those with fibroids? Check your existing policies to ensure those with fibroids or potentially cyclical symptoms are not disadvantaged.
- ➔ Facilitate conversations about individual needs and see what flexibility can be applied to help them thrive in their work.
- ➔ Encourage staff members to feel they have a safe space and colleagues who understand their experiences.
- ➔ Appropriate training for line managers to create a supportive environment.
- ➔ Chronic pain condition means managing symptoms.
- ➔ Health and wellbeing initiatives.
- ➔ Occupational therapists and HR guidance.
- ➔ Acknowledge that some staff might be suffering without being diagnosed or may not even be aware they have an illness; be supportive.
- ➔ Be kind and compassionate.

Raising awareness

- ➔ Raise awareness of fibroids at work to help staff feel supported. Do all managers know what fibroids is, and how this condition impacts their staff?
- ➔ It can be incredibly supportive, empowering and a real relief for an employee to say to their line manager or their supervisor - “I have fibroids,” and to hear back, “I know what that is; let’s have a conversation around how it impacts you and how we can support you.”
- ➔ More menstrual health information within the organisation.
- ➔ Menstrual health groups – advocate for women’s health at work.
- ➔ Collaborate with menstrual health experts and organisations.
- ➔ Take action in the workplace – take part in fundraising challenges, join employer schemes to show commitment to creating supportive workplaces.



Practical considerations

Think about practical arrangements that could help someone with fibroids at work, for example:

- ➔ Easy access to toilets.
- ➔ Access to private spaces if experiencing pain.
- ➔ If you have a workforce that requires to wear uniform, consider having options of:
 - Different sizing as those with fibroids may experience bloating.
 - Darker colours for those who experience heavy menstrual bleeding.
- ➔ Consider flexibility around working hours, this would benefit those with fibroids and enable them to thrive at work.
- ➔ Re-assigning work or duties.



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