



Menstrual Health at Work

Heavy Menstrual Bleeding at Work



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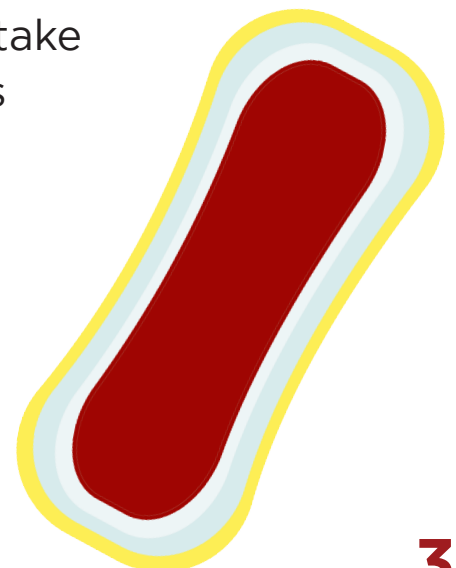
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What is heavy menstrual bleeding?

Heavy periods (also called menorrhagia) are common and may just be normal to an individual.

An individual may have heavy periods if they:

- Need to change their pad or tampon every 1 to 2 hours, or empty their menstrual cup more often than is recommended
- Need to use 2 types of period product together, such as a pad and a tampon
- Have periods lasting more than 7 days
- Pass blood clots larger than about 2.5cm (the size of a 10p coin)
- Bleed through clothing or bedding
- Avoid daily activities, like exercise, or take time off work because of their periods
- Feel tired or short of breath a lot



It can be normal to have heavy periods.

They can sometimes be heavy at different times, like when you first start your periods, after pregnancy or during perimenopause and menopause.

Sometimes they can be caused by:

- ➔ Conditions affecting your womb, ovaries or hormones, such as polycystic ovary syndrome, fibroids, endometriosis, adenomyosis and pelvic inflammatory disease
- ➔ Some medicines and treatment, including some anticoagulant medicines and chemotherapy medicines
- ➔ Stress and depression
- ➔ Rarely, heavy periods can be a sign of womb cancer

Heavy periods do not always need to be treated. But there are treatments that can help improve quality of life.

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



“I have worked in all types of settings – from busy pubs and restaurants, smart offices, various charities, to jobs where I needed to visit people’s homes and sit on their sofas. Heavy bleeding has impacted me in different ways depending on the requirements of my roles and how the workplace was set up.

Wearing uniform was challenging when the bottoms were tight and not black, some places required all belongings to be stored in lockers nowhere near the toilets, and one office had a toilet set right in the middle of the main room, which was painfully un-private. I actually used to sneak out of that workplace and into a neighbouring business to use their bathroom for some privacy – thankfully I never got caught.

When I worked in jobs requiring home visits I was petrified of bleeding on people’s furniture and would obsessively curl my foot under me to sit on or take a thick coat to put down.

I have excused myself from meetings early to clean up more times than I can count, left work to change clothes, and had to buy new clothes during the work day when I could not go home. Despite the obvious impact heavy bleeding had on my working life, and the excruciating levels of pain I was in with every period, I felt proud to have never took a day off work due to menstrual symptoms. I never raised difficulties with any of my managers and would have been mortified if colleagues had noticed I was struggling with my period.

Receiving a diagnosis of stage 4 endometriosis through surgery after 15 years of working was an unexpected milestone in my career.

I finally acknowledged the impact menstruation was having on my working life and handed in my notice, recognising how difficult it was for me to manage the job I was doing at the time alongside my condition. I took a job in a charity run by women – not an intentional switch because of my period, but a fortuitous one.

In my current workplace talking about periods is normal. Every toilet has tampons and sanitary towels on display, free for staff to use, in a range of absorbencies. Staff openly use hot water bottles if they have cramps, talk about the impact of their cycle on productivity, and acknowledge each other's discomfort. I am now open with my line manager and colleagues about my condition and the impact it has on my work.

It's hard to know how supportive previous workplaces would have been about reproductive health as I didn't give them the chance to be, but if I could go back in time I would be open and honest about my difficulties. It's important to talk about the impact of heavy bleeding at work as it affects so many people who have periods and can be very tricky to manage in the workplace.

I feel very lucky to work in my current supportive environment and grateful for the strong leadership team who have created a culture of openness and confidence in addressing menstruation at work. ”



What can you do to support employees with heavy menstrual bleeding?

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

Policies and support

- ➔ Are policies and procedures supportive of those with heavy menstrual bleeding? Check your existing policies to ensure those with heavy menstrual bleeding or potentially cyclical symptoms are not disadvantaged.
 - Logging in reason for sick leave – is it supportive of those with menstrual health conditions?
- ➔ Facilitate conversations about individual needs and see what flexibility can be applied to help them thrive in at 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.
 - Effective training in menstrual health
 - Train managers to be confident having conversations about menstrual health and are they able to cascade awareness of the condition within the workplace?
- ➔ Health and wellbeing initiatives

- ➔ Acknowledge that some staff might be suffering but are yet to open up about their condition and how it affects them; be supportive.
- ➔ Be kind and compassionate.

Raising awareness

- ➔ Raise awareness about menstrual health topics at work to help staff feel supported.
- ➔ It can be incredibly supportive, empowering and a real relief for an employee to say to their line manager or their supervisor, “I experience heavy menstrual bleeding,” and to hear back, “I know what that is and how difficult that can be; 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 experts and organisations.
- ➔ Take action in the workplace – take part in fundraising challenges, join employer schemes to show commitment to creating supportive workplaces.
- ➔ Foster a workplace culture that values and supports mental health.
- ➔ Take time to learn about conditions - but don’t use it against staff. (e.g., ‘Oh, they’re PMSing again’).
- ➔ Start to take proactive steps to break the taboo around period discussions at work and confidently normalise these conversations.

Practical considerations

Think about practical arrangements that could help someone with heavy menstrual bleeding at work, for example:

- ➔ Easy access to toilets.
- ➔ Access to private spaces if experiencing pain or are uncomfortable with their flow.
- ➔ If you have a workforce that requires to wear uniform, consider having options. For example, darker colours for those who experience heavy menstrual bleeding.
- ➔ Consider flexibility around working hours, this would benefit those with heavy menstrual bleeding and enable them to thrive at work.
- ➔ Providing period products in toilets.
- ➔ Allowing a culture of hybrid working will allow staff to feel more comfortable when they are on their period.



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Company number | 291285

Registered Charity in England and Wales | 1035810

Scottish Charity Registration number | SC051651

Funded through the VCSE Health and Wellbeing Fund, part of a partnership programme between Department of Health & Social Care, NHS England and UK Health Security Agency.

