



Menstrual Health at Work

PMDD at Work

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What is PMDD?

Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) is a cyclical, hormone-based mood disorder.

Symptoms arise during the premenstrual/luteal phase of the menstrual cycle and last until around the time the period starts each month. This will happen every menstrual cycle when ovulation occurs.

It is still commonly misdiagnosed as Bipolar Disorder or written off as 'just bad PMS.

Symptoms

Common symptoms include:

- **Mood/emotional changes (e.g. mood swings, feeling suddenly sad or tearful, or increased sensitivity to rejection)**
- **Irritability, anger, or increased interpersonal conflict**
- **Depressed mood, feelings of hopelessness, feeling worthless or guilty**
- **Anxiety, tension, or feelings of being keyed up or on edge**
- **Decreased interest in usual activities (e.g., work, school, friends, hobbies)**

Workplace testimonial



- Difficulty concentrating, focusing, or thinking; brain fog
- Tiredness or low-energy
- Changes in appetite, food cravings, overeating, or binge eating
- Hypersomnia (excessive sleepiness) or insomnia (trouble falling or staying asleep)
- Feeling overwhelmed or out of control
- Physical symptoms such as breast tenderness or swelling, joint or muscle pain, bloating or weight gain

Diagnosis

A diagnosis of PMDD requires the presence of at least five of these symptoms, one of which must be a “core emotional symptom” (one of the first four symptoms listed in bold).

The only way to currently get a diagnosis for PMDD is by tracking symptoms on a daily basis for a span of two or more menstrual cycles.

“PMDD came into my life four years ago, around my daughter’s first birthday. I have always had issues with hormones since my first ever period, being hypersensitive to fluctuating hormonal levels in my body.

After the hormonal bliss of pregnancy and first year of breastfeeding, PMDD was a shock.

After two years of massive ups and downs, cyclic anxiety, feelings of despair and depression, I was officially diagnosed at the end of 2022 by a very empathetic and understanding consultant.

She prescribed me HRT to keep hormonal fluctuations at bay, but my symptoms got worse in the last year, with more fatigue, anxiety and brain fog.

Thinking this might start to affect my focus and efficiency at work, I discussed with my manager about possible adjustment and got referred to Occupational Health for advice. We agreed on a reasonable adjustment I can use in bad weeks. That includes an additional day per week to work from home and a shift of a few hours to the following good week. This adjustment allows me to rest more and take a breath when my symptoms are too overwhelming.

Although my company have been very supportive with my reasonable adjustment, it had not been so easy to be approved by my manager due to PMDD symptoms being so unpredictable by nature, making the timings of bad weeks / good weeks also unpredictable at times.

But this got resolved after more discussions, trust and understanding on both parts.

I would encourage any PMDD sufferer to enquire about reasonable adjustments in their workplace to ensure the condition does not affect their productivity and therefore their relationships with their manager and collaborators, that could be detrimental to their career.

It is such a relief to know I can have some space and time to relax during the week when my symptoms take the best of me, and I can make up my hours later that month when I feel normal again.

Thanks to this process, I am now more engaged in women's health matters and an advocate for introducing additional relevant policies to help more women dealing with hormonal conditions in the workplace."



What can you do to support employees with PMDD?

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

Policies and support

- Are policies and procedures supportive of those with PMDD? Check your existing policies to ensure those with PMDD or other conditions with potentially cyclical symptoms are not disadvantaged.
- Acknowledge that some staff might be suffering with PMDD but not know they have it; always be supportive.
- Encourage staff members to feel they have a safe space and colleagues who understand their experiences.
- Be kind and compassionate.
- Take action to show women in the workplace that you are aware of the issue and are ready to advocate for them.
- Encourage having a Women's Health Advocate at work.
- Consider additional paid or unpaid leave days for employees dealing with severe PMDD symptoms.

Raising awareness

- Raise awareness of PMDD at work to help staff feel supported. Do all managers know what PMDD is, and how this condition impacts their staff?

- ➔ Train managers to be confident having conversations about PMDD, so they are able to cascade awareness of the condition within the workplace.
- ➔ It can be incredibly supportive, empowering and a real relief for an employee to say to their line manager or their supervisor, “I have PMDD,” 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”.
- ➔ Foster a workplace culture that values and supports mental health. Discourage stigma surrounding mental health conditions and encourage open conversations.
- ➔ “Take time to learn about the condition - but don ’t use it against me.” (e.g., ‘Oh, they’re PMSing again ’).

- ➔ Consider flexibility around working hours, this would benefit those with PMDD and enable them to thrive at work.
- ➔ Consider a compressed workweek or adjusted start and end times to accommodate fluctuations in energy and mood.
- ➔ Offer the possibility of remote work to create a comfortable environment for the employee to manage symptoms.
- ➔ Allow staff to take doctors’ appointments as they are very rare to come by but also because some appointments are synced with menstrual cycles and have to be conducted at certain times in the month and even within the day.
- ➔ Be open to discussing and implementing reasonable workplace accommodations, such as modified workstations or adjusted job responsibilities, during particularly challenging times.
- ➔ Create designated quiet spaces where employees can retreat when needed to manage symptoms like fatigue or discomfort.

Practical considerations

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

- ➔ Easy access to toilets.
- ➔ Access to private spaces if experiencing pain.
- ➔ If you have a workforce that requires you to wear a uniform, it is worth considering what that might be like for someone with PMDD. For example, if someone is experiencing heavy menstrual bleeding, are you asking staff to wear light colours?
- ➔ PMDD affects weight, think about having different sizes available in uniforms so those who have the condition feel comfortable at work.

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