

Menstrual Health Policy

Introduction

This policy assists with the creation of a workplace culture that is supportive and inclusive to ensure appropriate support is provided to any employee experiencing menstrual health conditions, (see Appendix 1). It aims to raise awareness and understanding, to outline support available, and sets out expectations so that all employees can feel comfortable initiating conversations about menstrual health in the workplace. For many menstrual health may not be an issue, but for some it will be and must be treated as a medical condition.

The organisation has a duty to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of all its employees under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. In addition, the Equality Act 2010 outlines that individuals must not be discriminated against due to sex or any form of disability, and the organisation recognises that in certain circumstances some menstrual health conditions may constitute a disability. The organisation is committed to ensuring that appropriate support is known about and offered to employees when needed to enable all employees to thrive at work.

Employer Responsibilities in Relation to Menstrual Health

Awareness, and training of managers

Managers will be made aware of the organisation's expectations on the approach to be taken and provided with guidance on handling personal health matters confidentially, ensuring that the employee has no fear of criticism, minimisation, ridicule, embarrassment, or discrimination.

Approachability

When responding to an employee experiencing difficulties due to menstrual health, managers will maintain an open-door policy so that employees feel comfortable in approaching them and discussing such personal issues. They will support employees to talk openly about their menstrual health situation and will not make presumptions about how they are being affected.

Open discussion

To ensure that it can provide the best support possible, the organisation encourages employees to be open and honest about their menstrual health and the impact on their home and work life.

During any discussion the manager will consider an employee's individual situation and evaluate if any workplace adjustments can be made. An employee's individual needs will be addressed sensitively, and confidentiality will be maintained. Managers will also arrange follow up sessions to evaluate the effectiveness of any workplace adjustments put in place.

The organisation understands that employees may feel uncomfortable discussing personal information with their manager. If this is the case the employee is encouraged to discuss their situation with another senior member of staff, HR or [insert details of a point of contact in place within the organisation for this situation e.g. Wellbeing Champion, Occupational Health and/or Employee Assistance Programme, if applicable].

Managers may carry out a 'return to work' interview following any absence; this is intended to be a supportive conversation to identify areas where support is needed.

Workplace adjustments

To assist employees in their daily duties, the organisation will explore adjusting their role or working environment with the aim of reducing the effect that their menstrual health is having on them. This can be done informally or via risk assessment. The organisation acknowledges that menstrual health conditions affects each individual in different ways so no adjustment will be made without fully discussing it with the employee first.

Examples of reasonable workplace adjustments [please select ones relevant to your organisation and add any other adjustments related to your workplace]

- Conducting a risk assessment to identify any particular areas that are detrimental to individuals.
- Assessing how work is allocated and whether additional support can be provided at certain points of the month, or at certain times of the day.
- Additional rest breaks.
- Consider flexible or hybrid working arrangements or home working; this can be on an ad hoc basis to cover intermittent symptoms and may include compressed hours.
- Changes to working hours or patterns e.g. start/finish times.
- Providing lighter duties or amended responsibilities during particularly challenging times.
- Making appropriate allowances under the sickness absence process.
- Providing access to a quiet space where employees can retreat when needed to manage symptoms like fatigue, discomfort or pain.
- Providing access to a range of free sanitary products, access to toilets and easy access to drinking water.
- Providing access to temperature control such as ventilation, desk fan etc.
- Changing the location of the employee so they are closer to toilet facilities or away from hot and cold spots around the office.
- Consideration of uniform – comfort and fit, breathable material, alternatives to enable temperature regulation.

Once the adjustments are agreed, they will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure they are effective and having the required effect.

Time off work to attend medical appointments

If an employee needs time off work to attend a medical appointment due to menstrual health matters, they should inform their manager, giving as much notice as possible. Managers may need to be flexible to allow staff to prioritise medical appointments as they may be synced with their menstrual cycles and need to be conducted on specific dates. As with any medical appointment, an employee may be required to provide medical evidence of the time and date of appointments and may be asked to make up the work time missed or take the time unpaid if appointments cannot be accommodated outside of working hours.

Other related policies [Insert other related policies your employer may have]

- Absence
- Wellbeing
- Sick Pay

Employee Responsibilities in Relation to Menstrual Health

Notifying and discussing any issues

It is important that employees prioritise their personal health and wellbeing. If an employee is struggling with any aspect of their menstrual health, they should notify their manager and discuss any concerns they have. Employees can expect to trust that their manager will treat any personal health matters confidentially without any fear of criticism, minimisation, ridicule, embarrassment, or discrimination.

All employees are encouraged to be open and honest in these conversations in order that the best support possible can be provided. Employees can expect managers to navigate the work aspects that are impacted and support helpful adjustments where needed. This may include, guided by the employee, any communications around reason for time off to the wider team or supporting the employee through self-management of their condition.

Supporting colleagues

There is an expectation for all employees to conduct themselves in a helpful and open-minded manner towards colleagues in the workplace that may be experiencing menstrual health conditions. The organisation maintains a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment and will treat any and all complaints seriously. If an employee feels that they have been mistreated, they are asked to please make their concerns known to their manager or a member of the senior team without delay.

Appendix 1

Menstrual Health Conditions

These are outlined as a brief and broad overview. There will be variations in their presentation for different individuals, and there are other related medical conditions that may not be mentioned within this list, so this list is not exhaustive.

Endometriosis occurs when cells similar to the ones in the lining of the womb (uterus) are found elsewhere in the body. These cells can grow and change in response to hormones in the menstrual cycle, this can cause inflammation, pain and scar tissue. Common symptoms include pelvic pain, painful periods that interfere with everyday life, heavy menstrual bleeding, pain during or after sex, painful bowel movements/when having a poo, pain when urinating/peeing, difficulty getting pregnant – up to 70% of those with endometriosis will be able to get pregnant naturally and fatigue, with one or more of the listed symptoms.

Adenomyosis is when endometrial tissue in the lining of the womb starts growing into the muscular wall of the womb. Common symptoms include enlarged uterus, feelings of abdominal bloating, fullness or heaviness. heavy bleeding during periods, pain during sex, pelvic pain and severe cramps during periods.

Heavy menstrual bleeding is when there is heavy blood loss or when a period lasts longer than 7 days. For some, period pain can be so debilitating they are unfit for work or if they are able to attend work despite pain, their performance at work may be impacted.

Fibroids are growths of spindle shaped muscle cells which commonly grow in the womb wall and can vary in size. Their impact on quality of life can vary; symptoms may include fatigue due to anaemia, heavy bleeding, pelvic pain, and abdominal bloating.

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) Polycystic ovaries contain follicles that are sacs often unable to release an egg that means ovulation does not take place. Common symptoms include irregular or no periods; irregular or no ovulation leading to difficulty getting pregnant; excess androgen causing physical signs such as unwanted facial or body hair; thinning hair or hair loss from the scalp; or weight challenges. PCOS can also be asymptomatic.

Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) or Premenstrual Tension (PMT) is when, for some, changes in the body's hormones before a period can cause physical and emotional changes such as mood changes, irritability, increased interpersonal conflict, or anxiety.

Pre-Menstrual Dysphoric Disorder arises during the week or two before a period. It can affect 1 in 20 women and is commonly seen in the perimenopausal phase. Often described as 'bad PMS', it is not suspected to be a negative response to hormone fluctuations – a hormone sensitivity disorder. It causes a range of emotional and physical symptoms and severity will differ. Common symptoms include mood changes, irritability, increased interpersonal conflict, anxiety, and being 'on edge.'

Perimenopause relates to the onset of symptoms of menopause which can be equally as debilitating prior to the body going into menopause. Also referred to as 'the change of life', the perimenopause and menopause can cause a chain reaction of physical and psychological side effects to the body of an

individual born female. Physical symptoms of the menopause can include hot flushes, insomnia, fatigue, poor concentration, headaches, skin irritation, and urinary problems.

Menopause is the time during a biological woman's life when menstruation periods permanently stop. It is defined as occurring when the individual has experienced no periods for 12 consecutive months and no other biological or psychological cause can be identified.

As a result of any of the above conditions, or as an extension of hormone imbalance, individuals affected by menstrual health conditions can also experience psychological difficulties, including depression, anxiety, panic attacks, mood swings, irritability, problems with memory, or loss of confidence.