

M³: Menopause, Menstruation & Miscarriage

Guidance for Managers

From the Music Publishers Association

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Mindful Employer



Wellbeing of Women Menopause Workplace Pledge



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A message from Paul Clements, CEO MPA Group

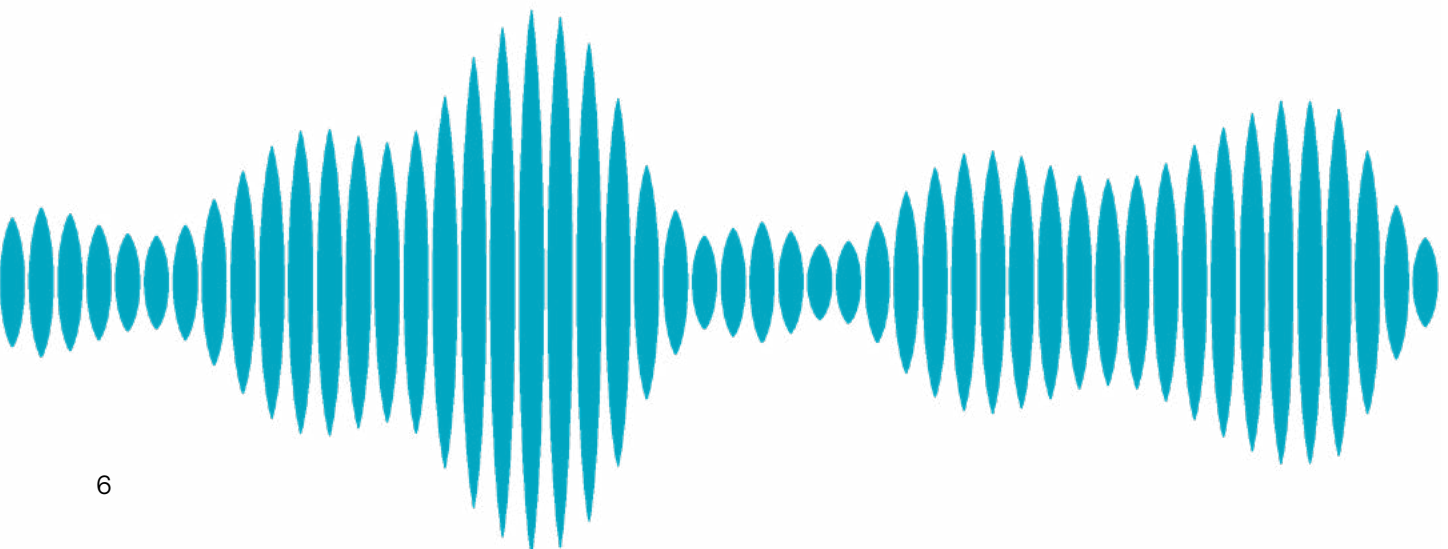


At the MPA we are committed to providing a safe and inclusive working environment for all employees throughout all stages of their working lives. We want to ensure that no matter what an employee is going through or what external health pressures they might face, we provide the support they need at work.

By providing an open, inclusive work environment and making reasonable adjustments for staff we know that we will foster a more productive and successful workforce, retaining experience and talent at every level.

We have created this guidance to help MPA members have the information and tools they need to support their employees and business through issues related to menopause, menstruation and miscarriage.

Paul Clements
CEO, Music Publishers Association



A message from Helen Choudhury, Head of DEI MPA Group



Through my personal experiences and the support I've received at work, I know how crucial it is to provide open, understanding and supportive workplaces. It's important to me that this guidance is a practical tool that MPA members can use to have a positive impact on their employees.

This has been written for our members, especially focused on those who have line management responsibilities. We hope it can help them to support their employees during different life stages with confidence, understanding and empathy.

We've separated this guide by each topic area for easy reference and included a wellbeing section that can be used as a toolkit of advice for those going through menopause. Each section contains useful links and contacts for further support should managers or employees need it. **Though we've provided practical and actionable advice, please ensure that your employee consults with their GP before they make any dietary changes or before beginning any new forms of exercise.**

Not everyone will need support at work, as everyone's needs are individual, but for those who do require it, I hope this guidance helps you and your employees find a positive work, life and wellbeing balance.

Helen Choudhury LLM
MPA Head of Diversity, Equality and Inclusion
Champion of Menopause
Mental Health First Aider

Inclusion statement

Throughout this document we want to be clear that at all times we are inclusive and understand that these issues impact people of all sexes. No assumptions should ever be made - as an employer, colleague or manager - that these issues only affect women.

We can recognise that menopause, menstruation and miscarriage are majority experienced by women and girls, but are also experienced by (but not limited to) people who identify as the following:

- **Women**
- **Trans men**
- **Intersex people**
- **Non-binary**
- **Gender fluid**

It's also important for managers to acknowledge that these issues impact those with different backgrounds differently. There are several factors, including protected characteristics like race, that can have an additional impact on a person going through menstruation, miscarriage or menopause. For example, a recent study highlighted that Black women were likely to start the menopause before white women, and were likely to go through the symptoms for longer ([Metro.UK, 2022](#)).

When applying this advice please be as inclusive, thoughtful and understanding of the range of symptoms, impacting factors and intersectional issues that might have a bearing on an individual's lived experience.

Background

I created this guidance due to my own experience of living with two chronic, debilitating and progressive gynaecological diseases known as endometriosis and adenomyosis. I am also perimenopausal. These experiences and the extensive research I had done around them made me realise that guidance for employees and managers could help create more supportive workplaces.

I spent some part of my working life pretending these issues didn't impact me, smiling and delivering work whilst in chronic pain. I didn't know if this was something I could discuss with my colleagues or manager, or whether doing so would affect my career progression. I want others to have the tools they need to ensure they don't have to do this too.

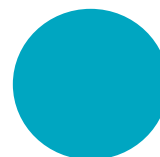
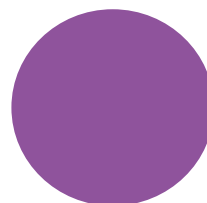
I decided that I should speak openly about my illness because as a person who fights for human rights, I should not be embarrassed by my own disability. I needed to be confident and share my story so that others would not have to go through what I have. I was fortunate to have good managers. What I found in my managers was support and understanding and I hope this guidance will help empower others to better support their employees too.

It is so important for people who have long-term health related illnesses or a disability to have recourse to open discussion and for managers to understand the impact that reasonable adjustments can have. Supporting not only their physical health but their mental health too.

I hope that by sharing my experience, I can help others open up and share their personal stories too. That we can help raise awareness and understanding around menopause, menstruation and miscarriage.



Helen Choudhury



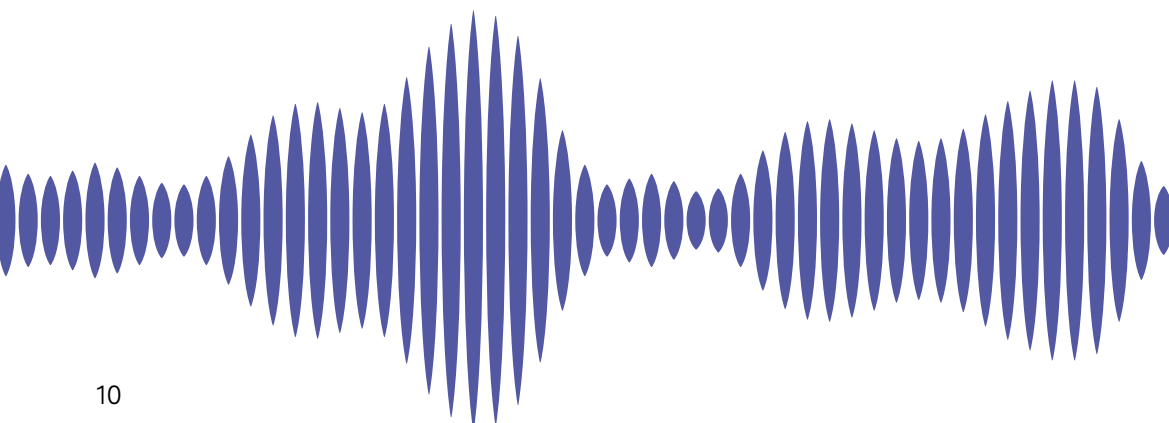
Introduction

This publication is your guide to supporting all employees through menstruation, miscarriage and menopause. We hope to provide you with the following:

- ➔ A comprehensive understanding of what each issue is and their symptoms.
- ➔ An overview of how this might impact employees and their performance.
- ➔ Guidance on how to have open and honest conversations free of judgement.
- ➔ Examples of reasonable adjustments to your workplace to support employees.
- ➔ An outline of the legal responsibilities workplaces have to support employees going through these issues.
- ➔ Health advice and how this can be applied to the workplace.
- ➔ Support groups and organisations that can provide further support.

Our aim is for managers and employees to have an awareness of what M³ means; Menopause, Menstruation and Miscarriage, and to help create understanding and open workplaces. It's also important to acknowledge that not everyone experiences these issues in the same way; we need to support everyone, even when the impacts are different from person to person.

These topics must not be taboo or hidden in your workplace, and all employees should have the opportunity to discuss them openly and without embarrassment. To do this organisations must first create a safe environment to encourage people to feel confident in discussing their health and wellbeing matters if they wish to. The first step to achieving this is that employees should not feel that discussing these sorts of issues will have any negative impact on their employment. It is the responsibility of the workplace to provide this.



Managers, while providing support, should ensure that they do not make any assumptions and remain impartial and bias free.

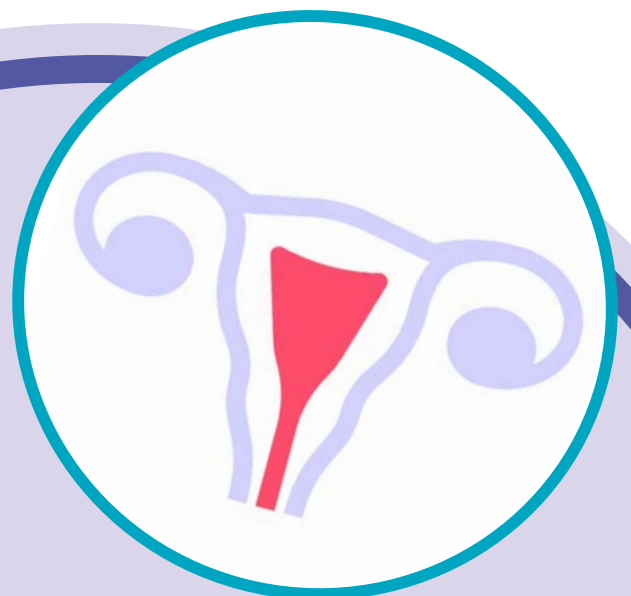
We also must be aware that menopause, menstruation and miscarriage do not only impact the person going through it but can also have an impact on the employee's colleagues, families and/or partners. Creating an open and safe environment in your office will allow all employees to better discuss what they are going through, either directly or indirectly, and ask for the support they need without judgement.

To show your commitment to providing a safe and inclusive working environment for all, join the MPA in becoming a signatory of the Wellbeing of Women's Menopause Workplace Pledge.





Definitions of Menopause, Menstruation & Miscarriage



Menopause

- Menopause is a time in life when periods stop, and the ovaries lose their reproductive function.
 - This natural event will often occur between the ages of 45 and 55.
 - Less often people may become menopausal in their mid-30s, or younger. This is then known as a premature menopause, or premature ovarian insufficiency.
 - The menopause is influenced by a change in hormone levels, particularly a change in oestrogen levels.
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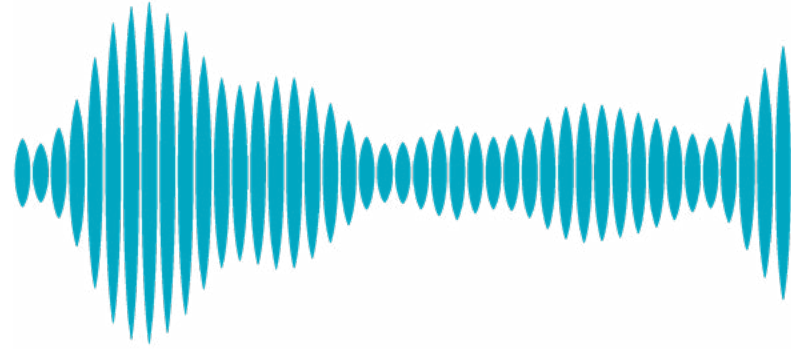
Menstruation

- Menstruation or period is the part of the menstrual cycle where bleeding occurs.
 - Periods can last anytime between three and eight days (periods that go on for longer than this may require a medical assessment to ensure that there is no underlying health concern).
 - They usually happen once monthly from puberty until the menopause.
 - Changes in body hormone levels before a monthly period can cause physical and emotional changes.
 - Periods can be very heavy, painful and can vary from month to month.
 - Some people may also have gynaecological related illnesses; for example endometriosis, adenomyosis, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), fibroids and other conditions.
-

Miscarriage

- Miscarriage is the spontaneous loss of a pregnancy before the 20th week.
- Miscarriage can happen very early in the pregnancy. This could be around the same time as a person expects their period and may be before they have had the pregnancy confirmed. A person can have a miscarriage before they realise they are pregnant.
- Most miscarriages happen in the early stages of pregnancy, with 70-80% occurring during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.
- Around one in four pregnancies will end as a miscarriage.
- Around 50 percent of miscarriages occur because there is a problem with the baby's chromosomes. Extra or missing chromosomes can occur in any pregnancy and are generally caused by problems with the early division of cells.
- Sometimes the developing embryo does not implant as it needs to into the wall of the uterus. The uterus then tries to expel the embryo before it develops any further.

M³



in the workplace

Our recommendations

We propose that organisations however large or small should:

- Consider including an M³ policy within an employee handbook or HR policies covering menopause, menstruation and miscarriage.
- Consider appointing an M³ Champion to provide support and advice.
- Share this guidance with all managers to provide advice and information to about the symptoms of menopause, menstruation and miscarriage to help them understand how they can best support employees who may be experiencing issues at work.
- Create a safe environment in which employees can openly and honestly initiate or engage in discussions about menopause, menstruation and miscarriage, whether they themselves, or someone they are supporting, is experiencing symptoms.
- Allow those experiencing symptoms to discuss these symptoms openly and ask for sufficient support and/or reasonable adjustments in order to maintain their attendance at work.
- Recognise that menopause, menstruation and miscarriage are individual experiences, and that people can be affected in different ways and to differing degrees and, therefore, different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed.
- Understand that particularly in the case of miscarriage a great amount of sensitivity and support will be required from managers of those impacted.

Chapter 1

Menopause

A Manager's Guidance at work

Introduction

In this chapter we will help you fully understand the impact menopause can have on an employee's health and wellbeing, and their performance at work. You'll find practical adjustments that you can make to ensure your workplace is more supportive, open and inclusive.

We've also provided tools to help managers have productive conversations with employees about what they need, alongside information on the legal aspects of providing support.

Companies and managers have an important role in removing taboos and helping employees to feel confident and empowered in asking for the changes they need to be successful and productive at work. By having a greater understanding of menopause and how this natural transition can impact employees' health and wellbeing, managers can encourage open conversations and create a supportive work environment.

Please remember: not everyone will experience symptoms, but it is important to support those that do.

For the manager - this guide will help you understand how you can support an employee - whether they are going through the menopause or are the partner of somebody who is going through the menopause.

For the employee - this guide will provide you with information on what to expect, your rights and who to contact for further information, including links to external support organisations.



What is menopause?

Menopause is a stage in a person's life when natural oestrogen levels fall and periods will have ceased for twelve consecutive months. Most commonly menopause is a natural experience, however it can also be the result of medical treatment or surgical procedure; for example as the result of specific medication, or a surgical procedure such as a hysterectomy.

Most people will experience menopause symptoms between the ages of 45 to 55, however it can be experienced earlier. Menopause that occurs before the age of 45 is known as early menopause and if menopause occurs before the age of 40 then this is known as premature menopause.

The three stages: Perimenopause, menopause and postmenopause.

Perimenopause:

Perimenopause can begin several years before the menopause; in this phase periods can be altered or absent due to a reduction in the hormone oestrogen.

Symptoms during perimenopause can be the same as those that occur during the menopause stage. There is no average age for this stage to begin but most people will start to have symptoms of perimenopause in their early 40s.

Menopause:

The next phase is menopause, when periods stop altogether. At this point the person should not have had a period for 12 consecutive months. Most commonly menopause starts between the ages of 45 and 55. Some people will experience it at a younger age and some symptoms may be experienced over varying lengths of time.

Postmenopause:

This stage refers to the years after menopause. There is no set length of time for it to be experienced. During this stage any menopausal symptoms experienced will decline over time and return to normal.

There is an increased risk of conditions such as osteoporosis during postmenopause because of lower levels of certain hormones. These risks are higher for those who have experienced early or premature menopause.

Symptoms

For most people the greatest occurrence of symptoms will occur during the middle (menopause) phase. Not everyone will experience symptoms during this time. It is common for people to have only some of these symptoms and they will vary in severity from person to person.

Most common symptoms of the menopause include, but are not limited to:

- hot flushes
- night sweats
- insomnia
- heart palpitations
- anxiety
- dizziness
- fatigue
- taking longer to process things
- depression
- headaches
- joint stiffness, aches and pains
- reduced concentration
- heavy periods
- changing moods
- dry skin
- osteoporosis
- lack of confidence
- feeling of isolation



Hot flushes



Fatigue



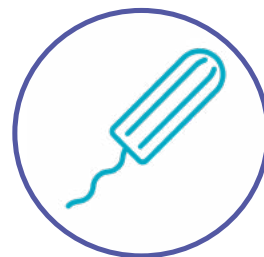
Dizziness



Headaches



Joint stiffness,
aches and pains



Heavy periods



Changing moods



Feeling of isolation

Employees may wish to seek advice from their GP if their symptoms are having an impact on their daily lives. Discussing their symptoms and the impact of those symptoms on their work with a manager and/or HR department is also recommended.

Menopause at work: how to support employees

Recognising how menopause might impact work

At all stages of menopause the work of an individual may be impacted. Though some people will transition with few difficulties, managing to the best of their capability, there are a significant number of people whose symptoms will be more severe, and their ability to work may suffer as a result. It's important to note that almost a third of all working people between the ages of 49 to 59 will be going through the menopause at any one time (Vogel, 2022).

The range of symptoms will be different for everyone and will impact their work in different ways. For example, some experiencing menopause will struggle with memory/recall, loss of confidence, and having thoughts completely disappear mid-sentence. It may become temporarily more difficult for those experiencing these symptoms to carry out certain tasks at work. Impact on attendance at work can lead to individuals being misdiagnosed as having a mental health condition or can be wrongly identified as a performance issue rather than a clinical one.

It can be distressing to experience severe menopause symptoms. This can have an impact on the working capacity of the affected person and may result in an individual needing to go part-time, or temporarily give up work entirely.

It's important to support these individuals when they are able to return to the workforce, in order to retain skills and experience within the industry. As referenced in the Menopause in the Workplace report, those going through the menopause may also suffer bullying or the threat of employment termination on the basis of a lack of understanding from their

businesses and line managers. (menopauseintheworkplace.co.uk/employment-law/menopause-and-employment-law/2022).

Creating an open and supportive workplace

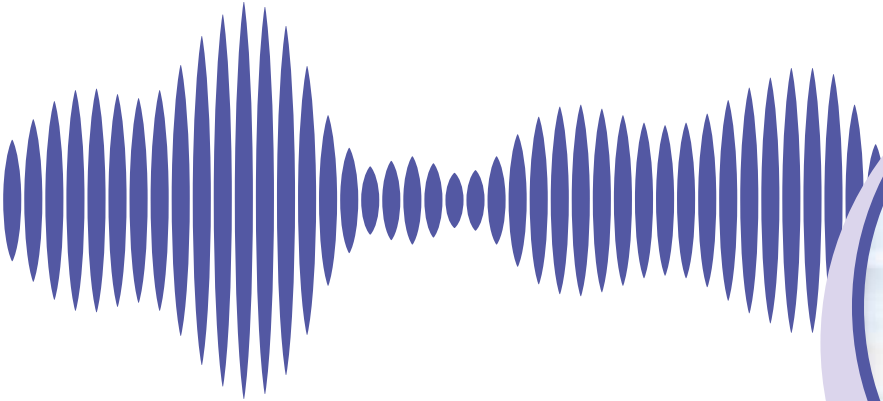
In order to foster an open and supportive workplace managers should have a good understanding of menopause, and know what symptoms might occur, as well as how these can affect an individual. It is important to acknowledge that symptoms will vary in severity for different people and at different times; for example, hot flushes can come on quickly and they can pass in a few seconds, but may also last much longer. There is also no set level of frequency; some people may only experience a few hot flushes per day/night where others can be affected hourly.

It can be very difficult for some employees to express how symptoms of the menopause can make them feel, and how those symptoms might be affecting their daily lives. Managers should try to understand this and find ways to support employees who are struggling with this.

Because symptoms can vary from person to person there is no blanket policy that will work for everyone, so an individualised approach should be taken. Employees should be supported by managers being clear that they are approachable and that the feedback, needs and requests made by an employee experiencing the menopause will be noted and acted upon.

It should be noted that some employees might feel uncomfortable going to their line manager for support and so other options should be clearly available and signposted. For example, this could be encouraging an employee to speak to a HR representative or their GP.

Having the conversation



Not everyone will want to talk about the menopause at work. However, for those who might, we encourage managers to foster a safe and open environment for this dialogue to exist.

Ahead of having any conversation with your employees it's important to have a good understanding of menopause and how it can affect individuals. Refreshing your memory by reading this guide ahead of any conversations can help managers feel confident in creating an open and supportive conversation.

Setting up the conversation

- It is important that individuals who are experiencing symptoms of menopause to feel listened to and know that their concerns are being taken seriously.
- Meetings should be organised with adequate time to have a detailed conversation, rather than a quick five-minute chat in the corridor.
- Meetings should be held in a private office or other appropriate room to preserve confidentiality, and ensure the employee feels they will not be overheard.
- Ask employees what you can do to support them, employees should be

encouraged to speak openly and honestly about the adjustments needed.

During the conversation

When discussing menopause with your employee don't be afraid to ask questions and show your support. For example:

- ✓ Would they like to talk about it?
- ✓ What can you as a manager do to help?
- ✓ What are their symptoms?
- ✓ Have they seen their GP?
- ✓ Are they taking any medication or supplements that help with the symptoms?
- ✓ Do they feel as though they have adequate support both inside and outside the workplace?
- ✓ What help are they receiving outside of the workplace? Is there any support they are missing?
- ✓ Do they require any reasonable adjustments at work (see next page)?

Reasonable adjustments

Let employees know that you want to help by trying to understand how they are feeling and how it might affect them/their work.

Discuss ways in which they can be supported in the workplace, for example:

- ✓ Adjusting room temperatures
- ✓ Introduction of fans in rooms
- ✓ Relaxing the dress code
- ✓ Access to cold drinking water
- ✓ Enabling employees to go outside for a short break while experiencing symptoms, for example during a hot flush
- ✓ Reviewing workloads and deadlines
- ✓ Flexible working patterns
- ✓ Permitting home working



After the conversation

- Make a record of the meeting, agree actions, how to implement them and next steps.
- Ensure that this record is treated as confidential and is stored securely.
- Summarise the actions that have been agreed so that both parties can sign the summary. This is in the best interest of the employer and the employee.
- Decide together if other members of the team should be informed, and if so who will communicate this, and how. Other team members do not need to be informed of the specific health issue. However, having transparency around the need for flexibility due to health reasons such as the menopause can help maintain a supportive working environment.
- Ensure that designated time is planned for a follow-up meeting to check whether the adjustments are working.
- Provide information leaflets and guidance about menopause for your office. Sharing this guide is a great start. Guidance and support are ever evolving and so managers should aim to keep up to date with the latest guidance.
- Employers should carry out a risk assessment to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the employee.
- Managers may need to seek advice from HR or line managers before making any reasonable work adjustments. You will record this as an action and ensure that the employee is aware that further advice or authorisation is being sought before any proposed changes can take place. There are links included in this guide that may be a useful source of further information.

Please note: You should seek qualified advice from a HR or legal professional before making any changes that might affect an employee's contractual hours.

Menopause and the law Equality Act 2010 – Disability Discrimination

While the menopause is not in itself a disability, conditions arising from it may meet the definition of a disability under the Equality Act (2010). Failing to provide support or reasonable adjustments to someone experiencing the menopause may therefore amount to discrimination.

If an employees' attendance or wellbeing at work is affected by the menopause, reasonable adjustments should be considered to support their attendance and performance.

Useful websites - Menopause

NHS

[nhs.uk/conditions/menopause](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause)

Information on period problems, miscarriage and other types of pregnancy loss.

NICE Guidance

[nice.org.uk/guidance](https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance)

Guidance on diagnosis and management of menopause, published in 2015. This covers advice to health care professionals about diagnosing menopause and treating short term symptoms.

The British Menopause Society

thebms.org.uk

Aimed at health care professionals, this has an open-access link to their Register of Menopause Specialists around the UK, both NHS and private.

Menopause Matters

menopausematters.co.uk

Daisy Network

daisynetwork.org

Information and support for younger people experiencing menopause and premature ovarian insufficiency (POI). Facebook page and support forums available.

Women's Health Concern

womens-health-concern.org

Patient arm of the British Menopause Society. Factsheets written by UK specialists include: The menopause HRT Cognitive behavioural

therapy, Menopause and hair loss, Testosterone for women, Contraception in peri-menopause Osteoporosis.

Wellbeing of Women

wellbeingofwomen.org.uk

Guidance on supporting employees with the menopause and factsheets on other health matters.

The Fawcett Society

A [report](#) on the impact on menopause in the workplace and the economic case for change.

The UK government's consultation on menopause in the workplace

committees.parliament.uk/work/1416/menopause-and-the-workplace/

Reading materials with useful statistics, including from an international perspective.

McKinsey research

Interesting statistics, particularly around attrition risk, including a [report](#) by employee benefits platform Circle In on the impact of menopause in the workplace.

Red Magazine

redonline.co.uk/wellbeing/a35934384/black-and-asian-women-menopause/

Specific information on how menopause might impact Black and Asian women differently.

Menopause Café

menopausecafe.net

Chapter 2

Health & Wellbeing

Menopause



In this section we aim to provide health and wellbeing advice for employees experiencing menopause symptoms. These practical and actionable tips can help make symptoms more manageable.

Before considering the advice or suggestions in this section, you may wish to consult your GP or other health professional first

This section covers menopause only, for information on menstruation and miscarriage related wellbeing, please visit [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk), [wellandgood.com/nutrition-exercise-after-miscarriage-abortion/](https://www.wellandgood.com/nutrition-exercise-after-miscarriage-abortion/).

A healthy diet

A healthy diet and some small life style changes can help alleviate the symptoms of menopause.

Research shows that people who eat a diet rich in Phyto (or plant) oestrogens report fewer hot flushes and other menopausal symptoms. Phytoestrogens work to balance hormones, increasing oestrogen levels when they are low but not increasing them unnecessarily when they are high. They mimic oestrogen because their chemical structure is similar. Anyone on HRT should try and eat those foods as they can be protective.

Phytoestrogens are found in food such as soya, legumes (chickpeas, lentils, etc), fennel, celery, ground flaxseed (linseeds), wholegrains, garlic, parsley, hops, wheat, berries, oats, rice, dried beans, apples, carrots.

Drinking the recommended six glasses of water everyday will help reduce the toxins accumulating in your body and keep you hydrated. Ensure you drink water as needed and bear in mind that tea, coffee and alcohol can dehydrate you.

A healthy gut

Good gut bacteria is essential for the absorption of essential nutrients. Maintain this by eating plenty of probiotic and prebiotic food such as fresh vegetables, fruit, fibre, live yoghurt, fermented foods, cottage cheese, pickles, etc.

Supplements

Supplements can help maintain positive health and wellbeing for those going through all stages of the menopause. Recommended supplements include Vitamin D, Vitamin C, Omega 3 and Multivitamin formulated for your age.

B6	May regulate hormones, improve mood, contribute to good brain health.
B12	May regulate metabolism, keep nerves and blood cells healthy.
Vitamin C	Helps to protect cells and keep them healthy, maintains healthy skin, blood vessels, bones and cartilage. Can reduce hot flushes.
Vitamin D	May contribute to normal function of the immune system and regulates amount of calcium and phosphate in the body. Comes from sunlight. Consider 10 micrograms of Vitamin D a day to keep your bones and muscles healthy. This should be taken as D3 (derived from animals), or D2 (derived from plants).

Essential Fatty Acids

EFA's cannot be made in the body. These essential fats are a vital component of every human cell and the body needs them to balance hormones, insulate nerve cells, and keep the skin and arteries supple and the body warm.

Omega 3 contains acids EPA and DHA. EPA is the anti-inflammatory side and the DHA is more for brain and eye health.

Omega 3 Can be taken as a supplement but also found in oily fish such as salmon, sardines, herrings, mackerel and can also be found in some eggs, some milk, yoghurt, flaxseed (linseed), walnuts, pumpkin seeds, green leafy vegetables, chia seeds, hemp seeds, soya.

A vegan Omega 3 supplement is available, usually derived from algae.

It's recommended that you eat three portions of oily fish a week. This will support an increase in the absorption of calcium from your digestive system and reduce its excretion in urine. This is particularly important for those going through menopause as it can reduce the risk of osteoporosis.

If on Warfarin or anticoagulant drugs, DO NOT take Omega 3 capsules or tablets, you will need to get everything from your food.

Movement and relaxation

Exercise

It's important to exercise at least a few times a week especially when going through menopause. Even 10 minutes a day is a good start. The following exercises are good for beginners: Yoga, pilates, walking, weight-bearing exercises and dancing to music.

Exercise also has a positive effect on your mental health as it releases endorphins (feel good chemicals).

Relaxation

It's important to think about how you can relax more often and actively. Here are some activities you may wish to consider:

- Yoga or pilates.
- Meditation.
- Aromatherapy.
- Reflexology.
- Reading.
- Listening to music.
- Relaxing bath.
- Make time to do the things you like.



Meditation



Relaxing bath



Listening to music



Walking

Meditation and breathing exercises

Learning to regulate your breathing and calm your mind can have positive impacts on your health and wellbeing. When regulating your breathing:

- Heart rate slows.
- More oxygen enters the blood stream.
- Communication with the brain improves.
- Increases your endorphins.
- Breathing is in charge of 70% of cleaning the body of toxins.
- When your blood is fully oxygenated it carries and absorbs nutrients and vitamins more efficiently.



Breathing exercises

Visiting your GP

For some of the health impacts of menopause it will be necessary to get advice and support from your GP.

HRT

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) involves taking oestrogen to replace the decline in your body's own levels around the time of the menopause. This can relieve many of the associated symptoms.

There are 2 main types of HRT:

- (a) Combined HRT (oestrogen and progestogen) for people with menopause symptoms who still have their womb.
- (b) Oestrogen only HRT for people who have had their womb removed in a hysterectomy.

This therapy is available as tablets, skin patches, a gel to rub into the skin or implants.

Please talk to your GP as HRT can be very effective, relieving symptoms such as hot flushes and night sweats. However, it can have side effects such as breast tenderness, headaches and vaginal bleeding.

HRT is also associated with an increased risk of blood clots and breast cancer in some people, therefore it will not be advisable for all.

If HRT isn't for you, then your GP may prescribe other medications that can help.



Long-term health implications of the menopause

▪ Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis affects one in two people assigned female at birth and one in five people assigned male at birth. It is usually diagnosed following a fracture or similar injury. Osteoporosis means bones are fragile but there may not necessarily be any pain.

As bone density is not routinely tested, it is essential to consider how you can maintain good bone health even if you are not diagnosed.

▪ Insomnia

One in three people are affected by insomnia. Some people have difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep for long enough to feel refreshed the next day. This can increase or even start with the menopause and can increase your risk of type 2 diabetes.

Sleep is vital for our health and general wellbeing. Chronic insomnia can also increase the risk of developing mood disorders, such as anxiety or depression.

▪ Stress

Short-term stress isn't necessarily bad for us. In fact, research suggests that it may have positive effects on our immune system. However long-term and continued stress appears to damage our immune system, and our overall health, including our mental health.

Useful websites - Related health matters

Hysterectomy Association

hysterectomy-association.org.uk

Endometriosis UK

endometriosis-uk.org

Verity

verity-pcos.org.uk

Fertility Network

fertilitynetworkuk.org

Chapter 3

Menstruation

A Manager's Guidance at work

Introduction

In this chapter we will help you fully understand how menstruation can impact an employee's health and wellbeing, and how this might affect their performance at work.

You'll find practical adjustments that you can make to ensure your workplace is more supportive, open and inclusive. We've also provided tools to help managers have productive conversations with employees about what they need, alongside information on the legal aspects of providing support.

Companies and organisations have an important role in removing taboos and empowering employees to ask for what they need to be successful and productive in the workplace. By having a greater understanding of periods and encouraging open conversation, alongside actively providing advice and guidance, we can help everyone feel confident and informed when talking about periods.

Please remember: Not everyone will experience symptoms, or need adjustments, but it is important to support those that do.

For the manager - this guide will help you to understand how you can support your employee going through period related health matters.

For the employee - this guide will provide you with information on what to expect, your rights, and who to contact for further information, including links to external support organisations.

What is menstruation?

Menstruation is one part of a person's natural cycle, when the lining of the uterus (endometrium) is shed. This occurs for those with a uterus throughout their reproductive life (on average between the ages of 12-55). With each cycle, increased oestrogen and progesterone help thicken the walls of the uterus to prepare for pregnancy (to nourish a foetus). If a pregnancy does not occur, then the lining of the uterus is shed, and along with blood and mucus, leaves the body via the vagina during the period as menstrual flow.

When does menstruation start?

In the UK, the average age for a person to have their first menstrual period is at 12 years old. Stress, strenuous exercise, and diet can affect when someone has their first period.

How long is the menstrual cycle?

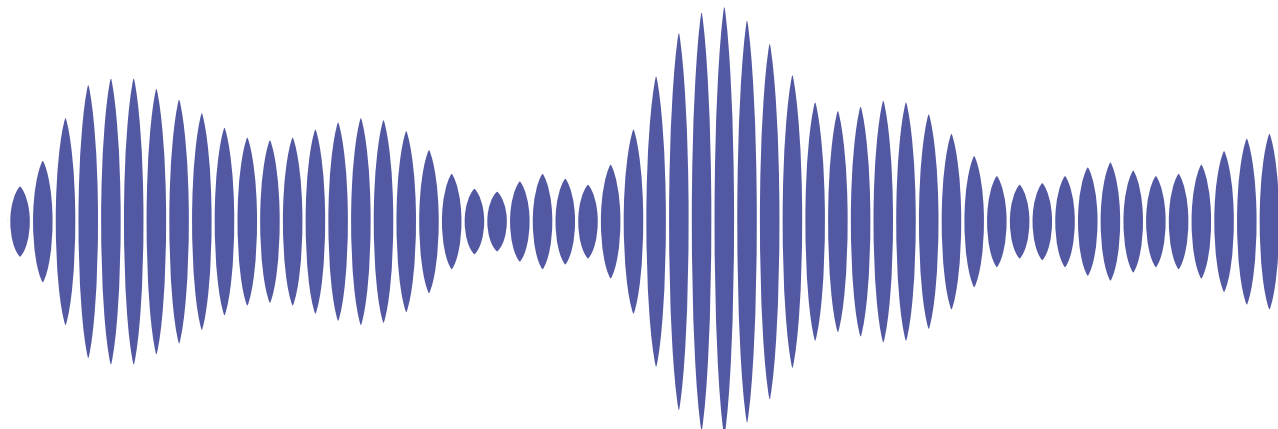
An average menstrual cycle lasts 28 days. However, the length of the menstrual cycle can vary, particularly for the first year or two after a young person has had their first period. Cycles can be as short as 21 days, or as long as 45 days during the first few years. Variation in the cycle can also occur during perimenopause (the first stage of menopause). Anything outside of this range may require medical attention, and if this is the case it is worth talking to a GP.

Symptoms

Many people feel mild discomfort before their periods. During periods many people go through premenstrual syndrome (PMS) where they may feel anxious, depressed, or uncomfortable. Some of the symptoms of PMS are listed below.

Please note: symptoms may be worse in some months and better in others.

It is common for people to have only some of these symptoms and some people may not experience any symptoms during their periods. For those who do experience symptoms, the symptoms can vary - both in type and number - but also in severity, from mild to severe.

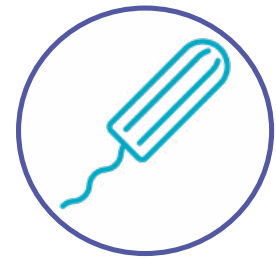


Symptoms may include, but are not limited to:

- acne
- heavy bleeding
- ovulation pain
- back pain
- cramps
- bloated abdomen
- constipation
- crying spells
- depression
- feeling irritable, tense, or anxious
- feeling tired
- headache
- hot flushes
- joint pain
- mood swings
- trouble concentrating
- trouble sleeping
- wanting to be alone



Acne



Heavy bleeding



Cramps



Crying spells



Headache



Feeling tired



Mood swings



Wanting to be alone

Employees may wish to seek advice from their GP if their symptoms are having an impact on their work and daily lives.

More severe or debilitating symptoms may be the sign of gynaecological related illnesses, for example endometriosis, adenomyosis, PCOS and fibroids. Please note that diagnosis of these illnesses can be time consuming and difficult, and that an employee undergoing diagnosis may need additional support.

Menstruation at work: how to support employees

Recognising how it might impact work

It is important to break down stigma and taboos in order to have open conversations about the symptoms employees may be experiencing. It's common for menstrual symptoms to negatively impact a person at work making it difficult for them to deliver what is expected or even to perform work at all. Simple changes like introducing a menstruation policy (see below for more information) can create supportive frameworks to help employees feel empowered to speak up about their needs.

The period charity Bloody Good Period surveyed people who have periods in 2021 and 73% reported that they have 'struggled to do their work in the way they want to because of their period'. Additionally, it can be particularly difficult to diagnose related health conditions that can cause additional pain and may impact the ability of an individual to work. For example, it takes on average eight years for endometriosis to be diagnosed – a condition that is thought to affect up to 10% of people with a cervix.

Other period related diseases may impact an individual's ability to work include but are not limited to:

- Dysmenorrhea or painful menstruation
- Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS)
- Fibroids
- Pelvic inflammatory disease
- Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD)



73%* struggled to work because of their period

**Of those surveyed by period charity Bloody Good Period*

Creating an open and supportive workplace

Creating a period-friendly workplace comes down to trust. It's important to trust employees to know when they are most able to work, and when they need rest or recover. Ignoring these needs will likely lead to a reduced overall productivity and lead to employees feeling that they are not supported. Creating a period-friendly workplace is not only the right thing to do but it also sends a message that an employee's well-being is considered and valued.

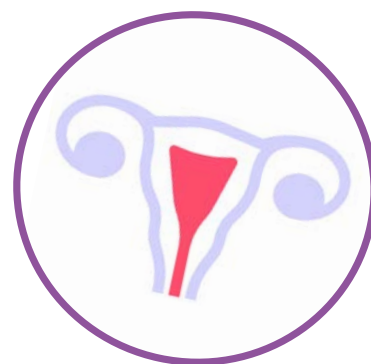
Employees need to know that managers are approachable and that their feedback, needs and requests will be noted and acted upon. By implementing changes like; having a clear and well communicated menstruation policy, approaching conversation with the below guide in mind, and trusting employees to make the best decisions for themselves and the organisation, you will help create a productive workplace.

Managers must ensure that they listen, are empathetic and help to find solutions to minimise the difficulties their employees are experiencing in the workplace.

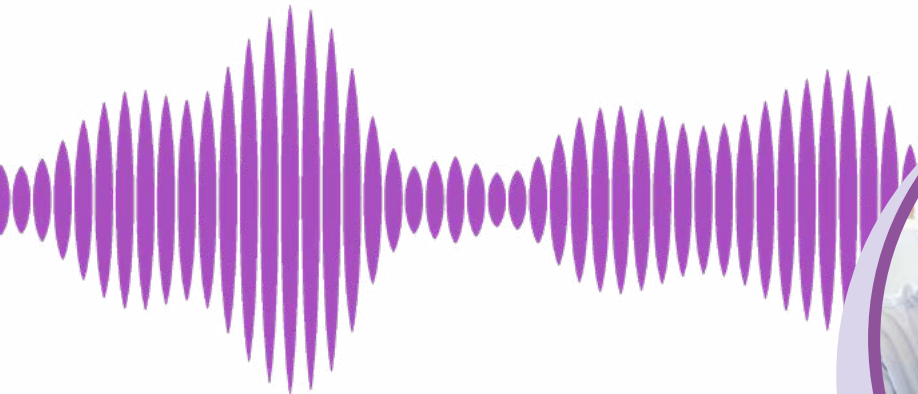
It is important to understand how difficult it is for some employees to express how period symptoms can make them feel or how it impacts them at work.

Please note the following when discussing menstruation and producing a menstruation policy:

- Some people might feel uncomfortable going to their line manager for support and other options should be available. If this is the case we would encourage necessary conversation to be had with an HR representative or their GP.
- It may be more appropriate for any absences to be managed under a sickness absence policy (with a specific mention of menstruation). This would ensure that people who have periods are provided with the same benefits and conditions (i.e., pay and requirements for sick notes, which in the UK allow employees to self-certify for absence for up to seven days) during their absence.
- There are mandated examples that exist; for example In 2022, Spain announced that it will introduce specific paid medical leave (up to five days a month in cases of severe pain – with a doctor’s note) for people who suffer from period symptoms. Those eligible would receive statutory sick pay from the first day of sickness.
- New managers should receive this guidance as part of their onboarding process.
- In the absence of any specific legal requirement to do so, it’s important for employers to thoroughly assess the benefits of introducing a menstrual leave policy.



Having the conversation



Not all employees will want to talk about menstruation at work, however we encourage employers and managers to foster a safe and open environment in order for the dialogue to exist.

Ahead of having any conversation with your employees it's important to have a good understanding of menstruation and how it can affect individuals. Refreshing your memory by reading this guide ahead of any conversations can help managers feel confident in creating an open and supportive conversation.

Setting up the conversation

- It is important that individuals who are having period symptoms feel listened to and know that their concerns are being taken seriously.
- Meetings should be organised with adequate time to have a detailed conversation, rather than a quick five-minute chat in the corridor.
- Meetings should be held in a private office or other appropriate room to preserve confidentiality.
- Ask employees what you can do to support them, employees should be encouraged to speak openly and honestly about the adjustments needed.

During the conversation

When discussing menstruation with your employees, don't be afraid to ask questions and show support. For example:

- ✓ Would they like to talk about what they're going through?
- ✓ What can you as a manager do to help?
- ✓ What are their symptoms?
- ✓ Have they seen their GP?
- ✓ Are they taking any medication or supplements that help with the symptoms?
- ✓ Do they feel as though they have adequate support both inside and outside the workplace?
- ✓ What help are they receiving outside of the workplace? Is there any support they are missing?
- ✓ Do they require any reasonable adjustments at work (see next page)?

Reasonable adjustments

Let employees know that you want to help by trying to understand their symptoms and how they affect them/their work.

Discuss ways in which they can be supported in the workplace, for example:

- ✓ Relaxing the dress code.
- ✓ Supplying menstrual products in workplace bathrooms (a small and relatively inexpensive gesture to make employees more comfortable).
- ✓ Enabling employees to go outside for a short break.
- ✓ Reviewing workload and deadlines.
- ✓ Flexible working patterns.
- ✓ Permitting home working.

After the conversation

- Make a record of the meeting, agree actions, how to implement them and next steps.
- Ensure that this record is treated as confidential and is stored securely.
- Summarise the actions that have been agreed so that both parties can sign the summary. This is in the best interest of the employer and the employee.
- Ensure that designated time is planned for a follow-up meeting to check whether the adjustments are working.
- Provide information leaflets and guidance about menstruation for your office. Sharing this guide is a great start. Guidance and support are ever evolving and so managers should aim to keep up to date with the latest guidance.
- Employers should carry out a risk assessment to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the employee.
- Managers may need to seek advice from HR or line managers before making any reasonable work adjustments. You will

record this as an action and ensure that the employee is aware that further advice or authorisation is being sought before any proposed changes can take place. There are links included in this guide that may be a useful source of further information.

Please note: You should seek qualified advice from a HR or legal professional before making any changes that might affect an employee's contractual hours.

Menstruation and the law

There are no specific laws or regulations that address menstruation specifically however if your symptoms mean you're unable to work the pay and requirements for sick notes apply, which in the UK allow employees to self-certify for absence for up to seven days.

Useful websites - Menstruation

NI Direct Government Services

nidirect.gov.uk/conditions/stopped-or-missed-periods

A.Vogel

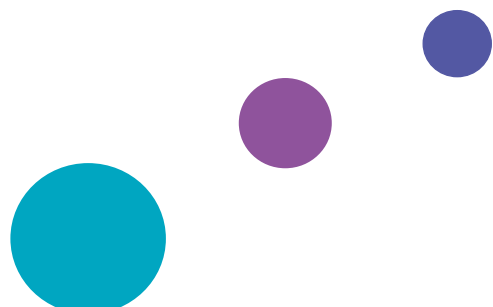
avogel.co.uk/health/periods/does-dieting-affect-your-period/

Office On Women's Health

womenshealth.gov/getting-active/physical-activity-menstrual-cycle

Women's Health – Menstrual Cycle

womenshealth.gov/menstrual-cycle



Chapter 4

Miscarriage

A manager's guidance at work

Introduction

In this chapter we will help you fully understand the impact miscarriage can have on an employee's health and wellbeing, and their performance at work. You'll find practical adjustments that you can make to ensure your workplace is more supportive, open and inclusive. We've also provided tools to help managers have productive conversations with employees about what they need, alongside information on the legal aspects of providing support.

It is important that managers understand that no matter how early in the pregnancy, a miscarriage is the loss of a baby, and should be treated as such. Being supportive and considerate to employees' needs will help them cope with their loss. Without this action it can lead to employee issues at work including: increased absences, lower standards of work and even the employee leaving the business.

It's important to note that a miscarriage can affect a person and their partner in different ways, and both can need support and help from their employers if they suffer a miscarriage. Not everyone will want support, but it is important to support those that do.

With the guidance we aim to empower employers and employees to have open conversations by providing the tools needed to create a supportive environment.

For the manager - this guide will help you to understand how you can support your employees through a pregnancy loss and related health matters.

For the employee - this guide will provide you with information on what to expect, your rights, and who to contact for further information, including links to other external support organisations.

What is miscarriage?

Miscarriage is when a foetus or embryo dies in the uterus during pregnancy. In the UK, that definition applies to pregnancies up to 23 weeks and six days, and any loss from 24 weeks is called a stillbirth ([Miscarriageassociation.org.uk](https://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk), 2022). There are a few different types of miscarriage and although the symptoms are similar, the causes are not always the same ([Tommys.org](https://www.tommys.org), 2022).

Some women have no obvious signs of a miscarriage and will have it diagnosed during a scan. Other women have symptoms that can be intense, including bleeding or spotting, with or without stomach pain or cramps.

There are a number of different types of miscarriage, some examples are:

- **Missed miscarriage** - when the pregnancy has not continued, though the individual does not have any symptoms. Sometimes the embryo stays in the uterus until bleeding starts. Pregnancy symptoms will become less obvious, gradually disappearing and there may be a sense that something is not right.
- **Blighted ovum** - when the pregnancy sac has developed, but it is empty and the embryo has not developed. Often, there will still be pregnancy symptoms, though they may suspect a problem when they start bleeding. An ultrasound will confirm a blighted ovum.
- **Ectopic pregnancy** - when the developing embryo implants in one of the fallopian tubes instead of the uterus. Around 1-2% of all pregnancies are ectopic and without early diagnosis and treatment, an ectopic pregnancy can be life-threatening to a woman. It can also lead to scarring of the affected fallopian tube or tubes and problems with subsequent conception ([Plannedparenthood.org](https://www.plannedparenthood.org), 2022). Surgery is often necessary, it will be either open surgery (laparotomy) or keyhole surgery (laparoscopy). There can be various side effects therefore it is important for the employee to take things easy and allow the body to heal and recover.

1-2%

of pregnancies are ectopic

([Plannedparenthood.com](https://www.plannedparenthood.com))

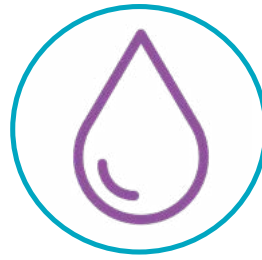


Symptoms

It is highly likely that anyone experiencing a miscarriage will show some symptoms, however these might not be obvious. In some cases they could be very alarming and the employee will show considerable distress. In these cases it is important to remain calm, support the employee and understand they may be in shock and unable to discuss the details or ask for specific help immediately.

Symptoms of a miscarriage/ pregnancy loss include:

- Bleeding can vary from light spotting or brownish discharge to heavy bleeding and bright red blood. It might come and go over several days.
- Blood clots.
- Stomach pains and cramps which can be severe.
- Feeling faint or passing out – this is more frequent with an ectopic pregnancy which can be life-threatening.
- Feeling sick or looking very pale.
- Pain on one side of the body.
- Pain in the shoulders.
- Severe constipation and pain.
- Sudden suspension pregnancy symptoms like nausea and/or cravings.



Bleeding



Stomach pains



Feeling faint/Passing out



Feeling sick



Pain in shoulders

Miscarriage is usually diagnosed or confirmed with an ultrasound scan. It may take more than one scan to confirm it for definite. In later (second trimester) pregnancy, bleeding, pain and passing a recognisable pregnancy sac or foetus often confirms what has happened without a scan.

Both partners can be severely impacted by a miscarriage - it's important to be supportive of mental health symptoms when it comes to both the pregnant individual and the partner.

If an employee has experienced a miscarriage directly or as a partner they may:

- Struggle with social interaction with people.
- Be more tearful or irritable.
- Struggle concentrating and being motivated.
- Have trouble coping with their mental health.
- Be withdrawn.
- Find sleeping difficult.

Employees that have had to go through surgery need extra support in the first few weeks after surgery, they should avoid:

- Strenuous physical activity.
- Lifting heavy items.
- Swimming until wounds are healed.
- Running or walking over long distances.

However, it is important to start to move around slowly and gently to avoid blood clots and carry out any exercises that your doctor advises, which might require further adjustments to their working day.



Miscarriage at work: how to support employees

Recognising how it might impact work

A woman may begin to miscarry while she is at work. If this happens the woman is likely to be scared, upset and possibly embarrassed. It's important to be extra sensitive to the needs of the employee at this point especially.

The employee will need to get medical assistance as soon as possible, so they will need to be taken to a hospital or to their GP (they may wish to go home first).

As an employer you may need to arrange for the employee to be taken where they need to go and if appropriate, support them in contacting their partner to inform them of the situation. Please note: it is advisable that they do not drive themselves.

If your employee is the partner of somebody who has a miscarriage and they find out about this while they are at work then they may wish to leave work straight away to go and provide support to their partner. It is important that they are allowed to do this, and important to support them when they return to the workplace.

Creating an open and supportive workplace

In order to foster an open and supportive workplace managers must have a good understanding of miscarriage and pregnancy loss, knowing how it might affect individuals and the symptoms that might occur.

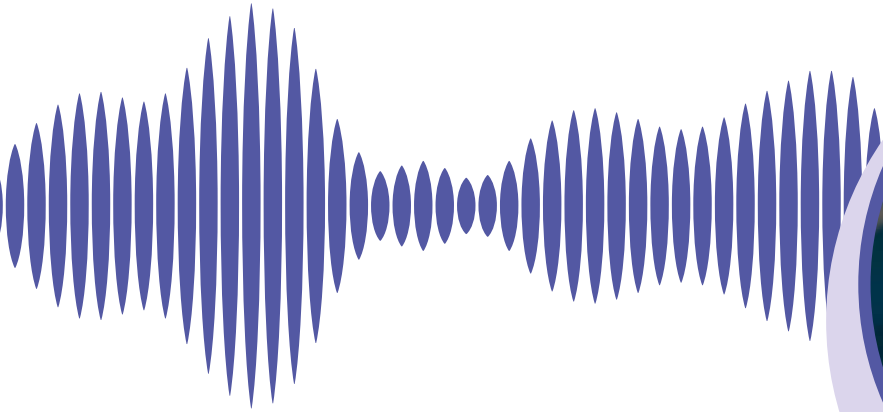
It is important that a manager understands how difficult it is for some employees to express the impact having a miscarriage has had on them individually. It's crucial that managers are responsive when approached by employees seeking help and/or support.

Employees need to know that managers are approachable and that their feedback, needs and requests will be noted and acted upon. It is important for employers to have a good maternity policy in place that covers miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy and still birth. By having a full policy in place it ensures that employees understand the support they can receive and makes it easier for them to share any difficulties they are facing with their managers.

Please note that some employees might feel uncomfortable going to their line manager for support and other options should be clearly available. If this is the case we would encourage necessary conversation to be had with an HR representative or their GP.



Having the conversation



While not all people will want to talk about it at work, we would, however, encourage managers to foster a safe and open environment for dialogue to exist.

Ahead of having any conversation with your employees it's important to have a good understanding of miscarriage and how it can affect individuals. Refreshing your memory by reading this guide ahead of any conversations can help managers feel confident in creating an open and supportive conversation.

Before the conversation

- It is important individuals who have had a miscarriage feel listened to and know that their concerns are being taken seriously.
- Meetings should be organised with adequate time to have a detailed conversation, rather than a quick five-minute chat in the corridor.
- Meetings should be held in a private office or other appropriate room to preserve confidentiality.
- Ask employees what you can do to support them, employees should be encouraged to speak openly and honestly about the adjustments needed.

During the conversation

When discussing miscarriage with your employee, ensure you acknowledge the employees' loss and show your sympathies. Don't be afraid to ask questions and show support. For example:

- ✓ Would they like to talk about it?
- ✓ What can you do as a manager to help?
- ✓ Have they seen their GP?
- ✓ Do they feel as though they have adequate support both inside and outside the workplace?
- ✓ What help are they receiving outside of the workplace? Is there any support they are missing?
- ✓ Do they require any reasonable adjustments at work?

Reasonable adjustments

Let employees know that you want to help by trying to understand how they are feeling and how it might affect them/their work.

Discuss ways in which they can be supported in the workplace, for example:

- ✓ Enabling employees to go outside for a break when they need to.
- ✓ Reviewing workload and deadline.
- ✓ Flexible working patterns.
- ✓ Permitting home working.
- ✓ Phased return to work (this is particularly important if an employee has ongoing hospital appointments to attend).
- ✓ It might be difficult for someone who has suffered a pregnancy loss to work closely with or near a colleague who is pregnant or has recently given birth. If this is the case, it may also be worth exploring whether working in a different location within the office would be possible and helpful.
- ✓ Be supportive of any time off the employee needs to take and keep in touch while the employee is off.

After the conversation

- Make a record of the meeting, agree actions, how to implement them and next steps.
- Ensure that this record is treated as confidential and is stored securely.
- Summarise the actions that have been agreed so that both parties can sign the summary. This is in the best interest of the employer and the employee.
- Decide together if other members of the team should be informed, and if so who will communicate this, and how. Other team members do not need to be informed of the specific health issue. However, having transparency around the need for flexibility due to health reasons such as miscarriage can help maintain a supportive working environment.
- Ensure that designated time is planned for a follow-up meeting to check whether the adjustments are working.
- Provide information leaflets and guidance about miscarriage for your office. Sharing this guide is a great start. Guidance and support are ever evolving and so managers should aim to keep up to date with the latest guidance.
- Employers should carry out a risk assessment to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the employee.
- Managers may need to seek advice from HR or line managers before making any reasonable work adjustments. You will record this as an action and ensure that the employee is aware that further advice or authorisation is being sought before any proposed changes can take place. There are links included in this guide that may be a useful source of further information.

Please note: You should seek qualified advice from a HR or legal professional before making any changes that might affect an employee's contractual hours.



Miscarriage and the law

If an employee experiences a miscarriage, then any time off due to this should be recorded as pregnancy related absence and should not be used against the employee in any way, by means of disciplinary or in a redundancy situation. As with other sickness absence, an employee can self-certify for up to seven days, after which they will need a note from their GP.

There is no time limit on absence after a miscarriage and an employee should be entitled to sick pay as established in their contract.

If a pregnancy results in a stillbirth, where the baby dies after the 24th week of pregnancy, an employee is entitled to statutory maternity leave and pay.

Termination of a pregnancy

What is the termination of a pregnancy?

The term abortion refers to the termination of a pregnancy. Spontaneous abortion or miscarriage is an unintended pregnancy termination. Induced (elective) abortion is an intentional pregnancy termination by surgical, medical or other means.

There are two types of induced abortion: medical and surgical. A **medical abortion** uses two types of medicine to end a pregnancy. It is the most accessible treatment option up to the 10th week of pregnancy. Medical abortion can also be referred to as “**Abortion Pills**”.

A **surgical abortion** is a procedure carried out by specialist doctor in a clinic. Surgical abortion is 99% effective, but up to 5% of women can experience retained pregnancy tissue, this will need further treatment with either pills or a further surgical procedure.

Termination of a pregnancy and the workplace

The emotional needs of a person who has had an induced abortion may differ from the needs of a person who has experienced a spontaneous abortion. However, in both circumstances, a wide range of emotions are common including feeling upset, anxious or sad.

Please refer to the above for advice on miscarriage on how to support an employee who has had a termination. It is important to let the employee guide you on how or even if they would like to acknowledge their pregnancy ending. **Do not make assumptions, for all types of pregnancy ending, people will have different emotional responses.** For some, the stigma and silence around termination may make it difficult for them to tell their managers what has happened.

Creating a supportive and open workplace

Many people will need continued support following an abortion whether it is induced or spontaneous. As you talk to your employee their story may suggest other social or health concerns, such as concerns about infertility, violence in the home and/or isolation. Ask if they are interested in getting additional support to help share their feelings and emotions. If the employee does not want any support, their wishes should be respected, and they should not be pressured in any way to share. It is important however to remain open and supportive in case their needs change.

Having the conversation

As a manager you must be aware that if you have very strong attitudes and beliefs about abortion, you might communicate them unconsciously through your body language or tone of voice. It's important to approach this with an open mind and refrain from imposing your own beliefs on the employee in order to maintain a good working relationship. If you feel unable to overcome your beliefs or attitudes, then you should ask another colleague to take over from you. Your role as a manager is to support your employee in the best way possible.

Useful websites - Miscarriage

Miscarriage Association

miscarriageassociation.org.uk/information/ectopic-pregnancy/treatment-beyond/

The Equality and Human Rights Commission Code

equalityhumanrights.com/en/managing-pregnancy-and-maternity-workplace/faqs-employers/employers-obligations-during-pregnancy-ivf

Guidance on supporting employees going through fertility treatment in the workplace.

Fertility Network UK

fertilitynetworkuk.org

Employers guidance and training on supporting employees with fertility matters.

Pink Elephants Network

pinkelephants.org.au

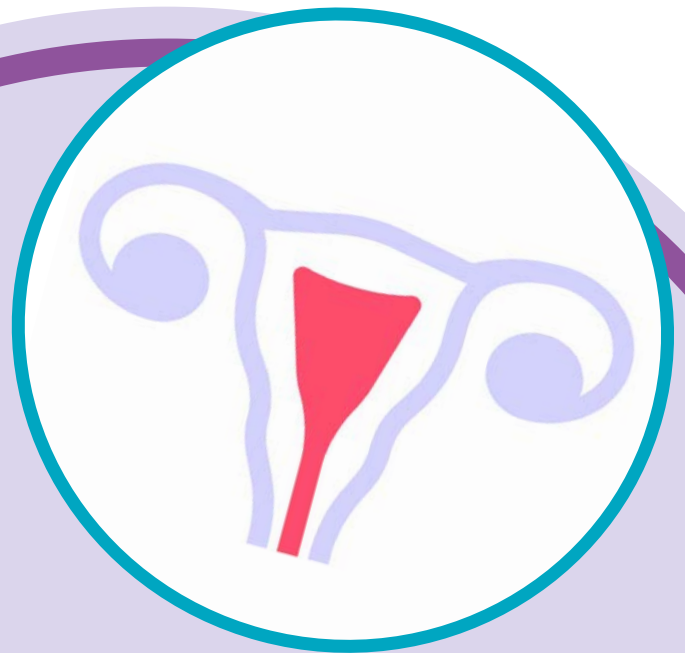
Guidance on supporting those who have suffered miscarriage and early pregnancy loss, as well as a study from the University of Sydney on this topic.

Mayo Clinic - Ectopic Pregnancy

mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/ectopic-pregnancy-signs-treatment-and-future-fertility

Wellbeing After An Abortion

sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Wellbeing-after-an-abortion.pdf





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