



Devon and Severn IFCA

Menstruation Policy

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Menstruation Policy

Policy Statement

D&S IFCA is committed to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of its employees and, in this context, specifically members of staff suffering from symptoms of menstruation.

D&S IFCA is committed to providing an inclusive working environment for all employees throughout all stages of their working lives. This includes enabling employees who are experiencing problematic periods to get the support they need in order to manage their symptoms at work. To achieve this, it is important for managers and employees to have an awareness of periods and to know that not everyone experiences these in the same way. These topics should not be taboo or hidden and can be discussed openly and without embarrassment.

D&S IFCA supports employees with this policy to raise awareness of symptoms of menstruation and enables employees to ask for adjustments to help them manage their symptoms at work.

It supports colleagues and line managers to better understand the issues related to menstruation and be ready to adequately support employees and have open and transparent conversations. This policy will help employees manage their wellbeing in their work and feel confident that they are supported. Where this policy refers to women it intends to include all people who experience menstruation.

Menstruation

Globally, approximately 52% of the female population (26% of the total population) is of reproductive age. Menstruation is a natural part of the reproductive cycle, in which blood is lost through the vagina.

For most women this happens every 28 days or so, but it's common for periods to be more or less frequent than this, ranging from every 23 days to every 35 days.

A woman's period¹ can last between two and seven days, but it will usually last for about five days. The bleeding tends to be heaviest in the first two days. Approximately 20 to 90ml (about 1 to 5 tablespoons) of blood is lost during a period, although some women bleed more heavily than this.

Menstrual Period and Premenstrual Syndrome Symptoms

These symptoms are characterised by their monthly predictable pattern, as they come before and during the menstrual cycle. Some women get only mild symptoms. For others, premenstrual syndrome (PMS) symptoms may be so severe that it makes it hard to do everyday activities like going to work.

Symptoms tend to recur in a predictable pattern; however, their severity can vary at different times of a woman's life. Most commonly experienced symptoms include: breast swelling and tenderness, bloating, acne breakouts, leg, back, or stomach cramping, constipation, diarrhoea, headaches, back pain, mood swings, food cravings, depression or anxiety.

¹ <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/periods/>

Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder Symptoms

Similarly to PMS, premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) follows a mostly predictable monthly pattern. However, PMDD is a much more severe form of PMS. Symptoms vary from person to person, and can include: irritability and agitation, insomnia, difficulty concentrating, depression, severe fatigue, anxiety, forgetfulness, swelling of ankles, hands and feet, fluid retention, allergies, eye infection, headache, dizziness, fainting, numbness, heart palpitations, muscle spasms, skin inflammation, and severe cramping, aches and pains.

Responsibilities

Experiences of menstruation can range from coping with mild discomfort to being severely debilitated. Yet, talking about menstruation can be difficult and uncomfortable. Many mask their symptoms in the workplace, and cope as best they can. Not everyone will experience every symptom or need help or support, however, most women are likely to experience symptoms to some degree. Employees may wish to seek advice from their GP if their symptoms are having an impact on their daily lives.

Employee's Responsibilities

- Taking personal responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and raising any concerns they have with their manager;
- Seeking advice from their GP should symptoms begin to affect their ability to carry out the full remit of their role;
- Being open and honest when having conversations with managers,
- Being willing to help and support colleagues;
- Understanding any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving as a result of their period-related symptoms.

Manager's Responsibilities

- Provide opportunities for staff to raise any issues relating to their wellbeing;
- Be open to discussing the concerns that the employee has about the impact on work as a result of problems with their periods, acknowledging the personal nature of conversations and treating them professionally and confidentially;
- Not make any assumptions regarding periods and ensure they listen to the needs of each individual;
- Discuss and agree with the employee how best they can be supported and be prepared to make reasonable adjustments to take account of any symptoms they are experiencing;
- Be familiar with the useful links detailed in Appendix 2 to signpost employees to;
- Seek input from DCC Human Resources and consider a referral to Occupational Health for more advice and support (should this be necessary), reviewing any advice received and implementing any recommendations, where operationally feasible;
- Discuss what, if anything, the employee wants shared with colleagues, how this will be done, by who and in a way that respects the individual's privacy but that allows colleagues to understand;
- Deal with any inappropriate conduct aimed towards someone because of their symptoms.

Specific Workplace Considerations

Working on Vessels

Working at sea whether on patrol vessels, survey vessels or fishing vessels, is a key part of D&S IFCA's employees' work. Employees should consider whether they are able to undertake this work when planning activities on vessels when they have their period, particularly on those vessels that do not have toilet facilities. This is more than likely to be the case on fishing vessels or D&S IFCA's patrol vessels than on chartered survey vessels. Therefore, careful planning for on board work is essential. In addition to employees' personal hygiene, consideration of the potential for toxic shock syndrome², when there is likely to be many hours away from toilet facilities, is very important. In order to plan for working on board vessels, preparation should include:

- understanding the length of time required to be away from shore on the vessel;
- Whether there are toilet facilities on board or suitable other facilities that can be provided together with privacy for the employee;
- Whether the vessel is able to return to port should this be necessary.

If the symptoms are such that being on board a vessel for any length of time without suitable facilities would be detrimental to the health, safety and wellbeing of the employee, the employee should decide whether they can undertake the work on the vessel at that time and discuss this with their line manager who can organise another employee to take their place.

Working on Estuaries/Shore

Undertaking patrols or surveys along the shore or in estuaries is also another key area of employees' work and may involve hours of work and take place some distance from toilet facilities. Therefore, employees should consider this when planning activities and whether they can undertake the activity during their menstruation. Whilst intertidal surveys take place a few hours either side of low water the employee should make the decision as to whether their symptoms are such that would impair their work on that day and whether they will need to have access to shore toilet facilities. They should discuss this with their line manager who can organise another employee to undertake the work if necessary.

Other Reasonable Adjustments

It is the employee's choice to share information about their menstruation or PMS, PMDD symptoms and with whom. Employees may be concerned about how to manage period pain at work, or what support there is available.

Employees are encouraged to be open with their line managers or senior managers. It is hoped that this Policy helps facilitate open and transparent conversations and removes any taboos relating to discussions about menstruation and symptoms. Appendix 1 lists potential adjustments that are available to employees when they experience symptoms of menstruation. To arrange for any additional reasonable adjustments if symptoms are severe and leading to period related medical impairments, an employee should talk to their line manager. If the employee finds it difficult to talk to their line manager they can discuss this with their Senior Manager.

Additional reasonable adjustments will be agreed upon between the employee and the line manager/Senior Manager and reviewed regularly if required. When discussing reasonable

² <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/toxic-shock-syndrome/>

adjustments, the employee and manager should focus on adjustments that can remove or reduce the disadvantage experienced by the employee and allow them to be successful at work. A medical certificate is not required to arrange for reasonable adjustments.

Appendix 1: Menstruation Symptoms and Reasonable Adjustments

Symptoms	Reasonable adjustments
Fatigue/ insomnia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow for flexible working (e.g., working at home, temporary adjustment to start time) Allow for more frequent breaks through flexible working
Irregular and/or heavy periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure easy access to toilet facilities Allow for more frequent breaks to go to toilet Access to shower facilities, if required Temporary adjustment to duties, if required Allow for flexible working (e.g., working at home)
Poor concentration/ forgetfulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider if concentration is better or worse at particular times of the day and adjust working pattern / work tasks accordingly Review task allocation and workload Have regular one-to-one meetings so that any issues can be discussed Provide books for lists or other memory assisting equipment Where possible, arrange a quiet place to work and reduce interruptions Consider noise-reducing headphones for wearing in open offices Identify and address work-related stress Discuss protected time to catch up with work if required
Mood swings / anxiety / depression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises or going for a walk Identify a 'buddy' for the individual to talk to if requested by the individual (this could be within or outside of their team) Allow for more frequent breaks through flexible working to undertake relaxation techniques or to have time out from others (without needing to ask for permission) Refer to Stress and Anxiety resources for D&S IFCA Staff Refer to D&S IFCA's Mental Health Policy
Headaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure easy access to drinking water, Where possible, arrange a quiet place to work and reduce interruptions Consider noise-reducing headphones for wearing in open offices
Dizziness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure easy access to drinking water, Where possible, arrange a quiet place to work and reduce interruptions Allow home working so that employees may use methods that work for them to alleviate/lessen these symptom Allow breaks when this symptom occurs

Symptoms	Reasonable adjustments
Leg, back, stomach cramping and pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For desk-based employees, undertake a workstation risk assessment • Allow for more frequent breaks so that the employee can cope with symptoms • Allow home working so that employees may use methods that work for them to alleviate/lessen these symptoms • Where possible allow employees to wear more comfortable clothes during their period • Adjust room temperature if required
Breast swelling and tenderness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow home working so that employees may use methods that work for them to alleviate/lessen these symptoms • Where possible allow employees to wear more comfortable clothes during period
Constipation, diarrhoea bloating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure easy access to toilet facilities • Allow for more frequent breaks to go to toilet • Access to shower facilities, if required • Temporary adjustment to duties, if required • Ensure easy access to drinking water • Allow for flexible working (e.g., working at home)

Appendix 2: Useful Links

NHS – Periods Overview www.nhs.uk/conditions/periods	An overview of periods, together with information about different products and problems
Women's Health – Menstrual Cycle www.womenshealth.gov/menstrual-cycle	Provides information and resources regarding periods
NHS – Mindfulness www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness	An overview of mindfulness, together with tips on how to be more mindful
NHS Inform https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/womens-health/girls-and-young-women-puberty-to-around-25/periods-and-menstrual-health/periods-menstruation	An NHS Scotland webs-page which provides information and useful apps.
&SISTERS https://andsisters.com/blogs/blog/here-s-how-to-survive-your-period-at-work	A website regarding female health and period products. Information on coping with periods at work.

