



Menstrual health and wellbeing support at Avalere Health

This document isn't just for those directly experiencing menstruation: it's for everyone.

In this document, we outline the support available to colleagues who menstruate and provide education for everyone. Our aim is to build a shared understanding among employees, colleagues, and managers, and to create a supportive environment for anyone experiencing menstrual symptoms. We are committed to offering the same level of understanding and support to everyone, while supporting your individual needs.

What is menstruation?

Menstruation can affect people of many genders, including most cisgender women, and some transgender and nonbinary people. Not everyone in these groups menstruates, and experiences can vary widely depending on individual health, surgeries, or hormones.

Key features

- Menstruation, also known as a period, is the monthly shedding of the uterus lining, accompanied by bleeding, that occurs as part of the reproductive cycle for people who menstruate.

- Each month, the uterus lining (endometrium) thickens to prepare for a fertilized egg.
- An egg is released from the ovary (ovulation) and if the egg is not fertilized, hormone levels drop causing the uterus lining to break down and shed from the body through vaginal bleeding which can last between 2-7 days, and then the process begins again.
- This is a normal and natural part of the body's preparation for potential pregnancy.

Symptoms

Menstrual symptoms, caused by the fluctuating hormone levels, can vary from person to person, and the impact of these symptoms may affect some people's daily lives. These symptoms include (but are not limited to):

Physical symptoms

- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Stomach cramps
- Headaches
- Breast tenderness
- Bloating and fluid retention
- Acne
- Changes in appetite
- Constipation or diarrhoea

Emotional symptoms

- Mood swings
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Difficulty concentrating

When to seek medical attention

While many of these symptoms are normal, medical attention should be given when:

- Symptoms are severe enough to affect daily life
- There are any concerns over changes in vaginal discharge at any time of the month

Please contact a healthcare provider if you have questions about your cycle.

Chronic conditions associated with menstruation

Some people will be afflicted by chronic conditions associated with menstruation such as:

Endometriosis

A chronic condition where tissue similar to the lining of the womb (endometrium) grows outside the uterus - most commonly on the pelvis but also on the ovaries, fallopian tubes, bladder, or bowel. This tissue responds to hormone changes during the menstrual cycle causing bleeding, inflammation, and scar tissue. Endometriosis affects about 1 in 10 people assigned female at birth and can have a significant impact on a person's quality of life.

Key features

- Severe pain
- Heavy periods
- Pain during sex or bowel movements
- Digestive symptoms or chronic fatigue

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)

A lifelong complex condition that is not fully understood but is thought to be caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. This is a common hormonal disorder affecting people of reproductive age who menstruate.

Key features

- Elevated androgen levels leading to excess hair growth and/or acne
- Irregular or absent periods due to infrequent or absent ovulation
- Weight gain
- Difficulty in getting pregnant
- Insulin resistance

Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD)

PMDD is a hormone-related mood disorder, not a behavioral choice. Symptoms are much more severe than PMS and can significantly interfere with a person's work, relationships, and social life.

Key features

- Headaches
- Muscle and joint pain
- Bloating
- Sleep problems
- Difficulty concentrating

If you experience symptoms of any of these conditions, please reach out to a healthcare provider for a proper diagnosis. Seeking professional medical advice is crucial.



Talk to us: open conversations

We want our people to feel comfortable and empowered to ask for the support they need.

- If you are finding it difficult to cope at work because of menstrual symptoms, you can speak to your manager, if you wish to do so.
- If for any reason you feel unable to approach your manager, you can speak to your People Partner or the Benefits Team.
- Any health-related information disclosed during discussions with your manager or the People Team will be treated sensitively and in confidence.

Our goal is to ensure that all managers are provided with adequate information through this policy and resources.

While many who menstruate will be able to carry on their working lives as normal, we recognize that others may benefit from adjustments to their working conditions to mitigate the impact of symptoms at work. If someone is experiencing adverse menstruation symptoms, the following options are available:

Support and adjustments

Requests for flexible working can be made informally or formally, and may include:

- A change to the pattern of hours worked

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- Increased homeworking
- A reduction in working hours
- Taking more frequent breaks

This list is not exhaustive. Any request should be discussed and agreed with your manager and People Partner and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure the adjustments continue to support your needs. This time may come from sick leave, annual leave/PTO, or additional paid time off, depending on your situation. We will work closely with you to determine the most appropriate form of support and will try to facilitate flexible working arrangements wherever possible, although this cannot be guaranteed.

Office working environment

If you need time out to take a short break to manage symptoms, to take medication, or need a quiet space to work, private spaces are available in most of our offices. Your People Partner will work with you to accommodate this.

We have period-friendly offices where people have access to free menstrual products.

Time off

We recognize that period pain is real and can significantly impact someone's ability to work, so to support you we have expanded the use of paid sick time to include period symptoms so you can take paid leave if your period pain is making it difficult to work.

Paid time off for periods should only be utilized when experiencing period discomfort, pain, and/or other adverse symptoms impacting your ability to work.

Unless otherwise set out in your contract, if you are sick and unable to work, you should follow the sickness policy and reporting procedure.

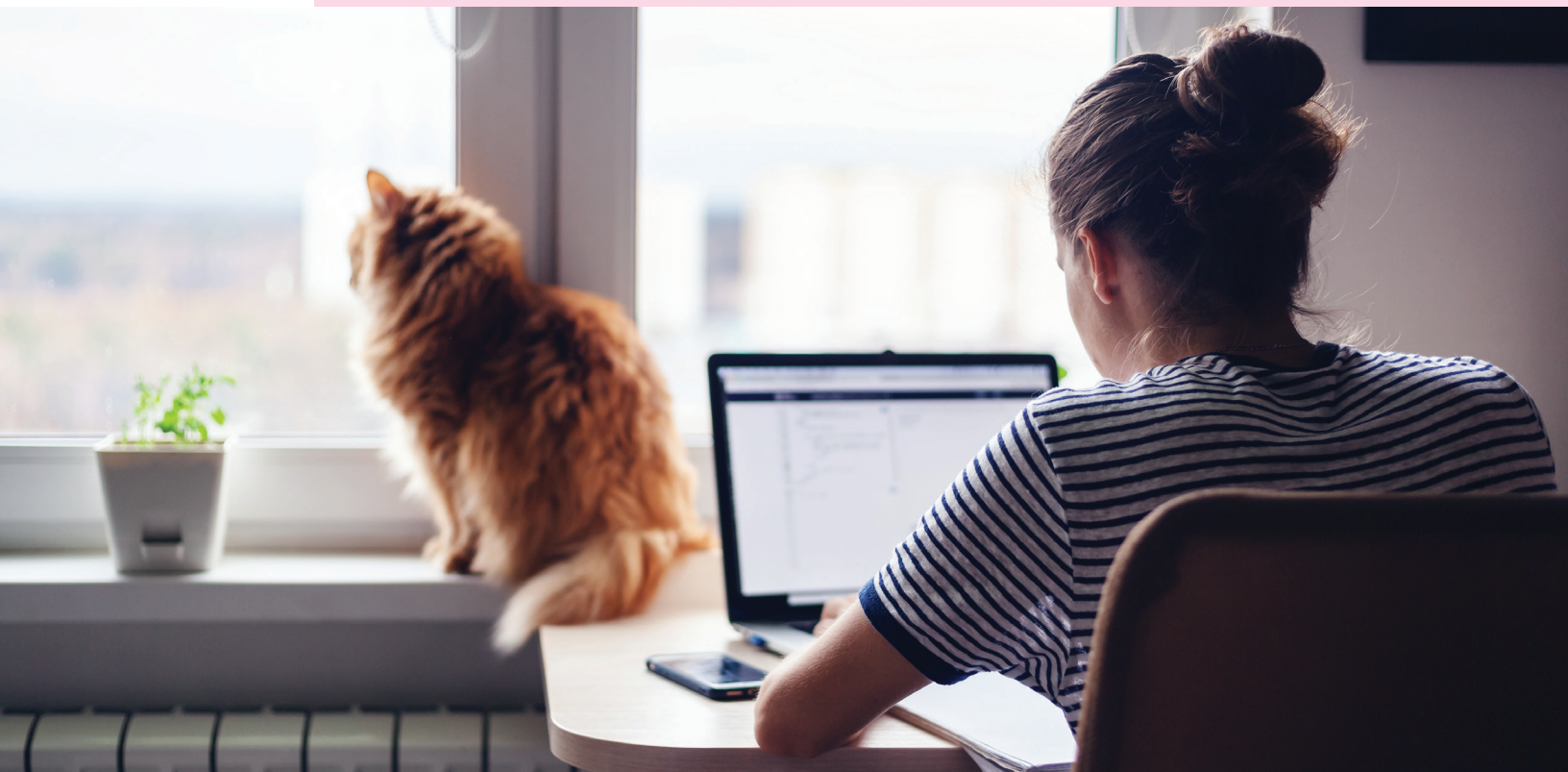
You do not have to disclose that your absence is related to menstruation if you wish to keep this private.

Ability to perform your role

We don't want to make any assumptions about the impact of menstruation on anyone's ability to perform in their role, but we do recognize that experiencing long-term symptoms of menstruation may pose a challenge to some of our people. If you feel this may be affecting your ability to perform in your role, please speak to your manager and/or your People Partner so we can discuss how we can best support you and any adjustments that may help.

Our commitment

We recognize that menstruation may be different for everyone; therefore, your support needs may change over time. We are here to help make your experience at work more comfortable and are open to hearing how we can do that for you.



For managers and teams

Be considerate, understanding, and supportive

- Take time to read through this policy and understand what someone experiencing adverse menstrual symptoms may be dealing with, and how this can impact their working life.
- Understand how to recognize the symptoms and what support could be helpful so you can be there for someone without them necessarily having to open up to you, if they're not comfortable doing so.
- If someone does open up to you about how they're feeling, be considerate about what they may need from you as a teammate or manager even if they're not asking for anything.
- Consider taking this [LinkedIn Learning course](#) on compassionate leadership.

If you're unsure, speak to the People Team

- If you have any concerns or are unsure how to support or manage someone experiencing adverse menstrual symptoms, please speak to your People Partner or a member of the Benefits Team, who can support you.
- Please encourage open dialogue with the individual. Creating a trusting and open environment will make them feel more comfortable sharing with you what they're experiencing and what they need from you.

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- Since a variety of people could be experiencing adverse menstrual symptoms, including trans men and non-binary people, try to keep your language gender-neutral when discussing this in a group, as this will encourage those people to access support and ask for help. Check out this [LinkedIn Learning course](#) on the importance of gender-neutral language.
- Menstrual symptoms could also cause increased feelings of gender dysphoria for some trans people, which could make them reluctant to discuss it. The best route when supporting someone is to follow their lead and support them where you can.
- It's important to treat anyone struggling with adverse menstrual symptoms fairly and acknowledge there may be some need for reasonable adjustments to support them as they manage their symptoms. If at any point you feel, as a manager, it's starting to impact their performance or something isn't quite right, have a conversation with them to understand what's happening and agree on appropriate support mechanisms. The People Team can also assist you with this.

Further support

We have several resources available that you can access for support.*



People Team: The People Team is always available to speak to if you have any questions or require support. You can [email](#) the Benefits Team or find your relevant People Partner on Connect [here](#).



Employee Network Groups (ENGs): Our ENGs provide a safe space to discuss topics related to periods, menopause, and more. You can join an ENG through this [link](#).



ZAOWOMAN: A partner of Avalere Health's – a women's health education and support organization offering training, access to healthcare professional hormone support, and health coaching. Link [here](#).





UK employee benefits and resources

- **Employee Assistance Program (EAP):** You can use our EAP to speak to an independent advisor on a confidential basis about any issue that is troubling you.
 - UK confidential helpline: 08083 043 698 (available 24/7)
 - Additional information is available online through our Connect link [here](#).
- **Peppy UK and Ireland:** Peppy is a team of experienced nurses and emotional support practitioners who provide support in areas including menstruation. For more information, visit our Connect page for Peppy UK and Ireland [here](#).
- **Occupational Health (UK only):** In some cases, we may refer you to Occupational Health so that they can advise on how your symptoms are impacting you at work and recommend adjustments that may be appropriate. They may also signpost you to external sources for help and advice.



US employee benefits and resources

- **Employee Assistance Program (EAP):** You can use our EAP to speak to an independent adviser on a confidential basis about any issue that is troubling you.
 - US confidential helpline: 1-800-523-5668 (available 24/7)
 - Additional information is available online through our Connect link [here](#).
- **Peppy US and Global:** Peppy is a team of experienced nurses and emotional support practitioners who provide support in areas including menstruation. For more information, visit our Connect page for Peppy US [here](#).
- **Visana:** A virtual health clinic in the Cigna health plan network, Visana's team of health doctors, nurse practitioners, and health coaches will help you better understand your body and get answers to your medical questions. Get more information or make an appointment [here](#).

* For those who require support and reside outside of the UK and US, please reach out to your People Partner for more information specific to your location.

Resources

- **The Period Party podcast:** The Period Party is what happens when you get the world's leading women's health experts unscripted, uncensored, and on the air.
- **Period Story podcast:** A nutritionist, Le'Nise Brothers, has conversations about periods, breaking taboos, and getting behind the menstrual health myths.
- **28ish Days Later podcast:** A taboo-busting podcast series exploring the menstrual cycle.
- **Menstrual Movement:** Support the menstrual movement.
- **Period Power: A Manifesto for the Menstrual:** a movement by Nadya Okamoto – a call to action for anyone interested in menstrual advocacy or just learning more about how bleeding once a month affects half the people in the world.
- **Heavy Flow, Breaking the Curse of Menstruation by Amanda Laird:** Breaking down the myths (and misogyny) around menstruation. She also explains why period pain has been ignored for so long and what can be done about it.

If you have any questions or need further guidance, please reach out to your **People Partner**.