



**Inspire Multi Academy Trust**

## **Menopause and Menstrual Health Policy**

Policy Reviewed	July 24
Policy Adopted by Board of Trustees:	July 24
Review Frequency	As Required
Date of Next Review	As Required
Responsible Officer	Joanne West
Signed on behalf of the Board of Trustees:	S Ruffell

# Policy Outline

## Reviewing the Policy

TfC People Services Team will keep the operation of this policy under review and will make such changes to the policy as deemed appropriate following consultation with the trade unions, where appropriate.

## Personalising the Policy

TfC People Services Team has developed a number of model policies for schools and academies to consider and adopt as their own. There is one section within this policy which requires either amendments and/or deletion to the specific paragraphs to ensure the policy is accurate in setting out your operational requirements. We advise that this section is amended prior to the policy being adopted.

The relevant section in this policy we advise you consider is; [Paragraph 12, Menopause Champion](#). If your school does not have a Menopause champion this can be removed. If you do have a menopause champion, please include their details as a point of contact.

Consultation with recognised trade unions has been undertaken prior to the issuing of this model policy. Should you wish to make amendments to the contents of this policy (save for those as set-out above in 'Personalising the Policy') then you may need to enter in further consultation with recognised trade unions. Please seek advice from your HR provider.

In addition, the term 'school' referred to in this policy means: all schools whether maintained, non-maintained or independent schools (including academies, free schools and alternative provision academies), maintained nursery schools and pupil referral units. This term could be amended throughout the policy where deemed appropriate by the setting.

## Summary of Changes

Reference to Menstrual Health has been included within this policy with specific reference to symptoms and treatment for PMS and PMDD and endometriosis. This is to reflect the BSI guide relating to Menstruation, menstrual health and menopause in the workplace.

## Equality Impact Assessment

As with all policies that affect service users, the wider community or employees, schools should undertake an analysis of the potential equality impacts and record that assessment.

## Contacts for help and assistance

Please contact your allocated HR Business Partner within the TfC People Services Team for help and assistance in applying the content of this policy. Alternatively you can email the TfC People Services Team at; Email [PeopleAdvice@togetherforchildren.org.uk](mailto:PeopleAdvice@togetherforchildren.org.uk)

# Contents

- 1 [Introduction](#)
- 2 [Employee Health and Wellbeing](#)
- 3 [Scope of Policy](#)
- 4 [Data Protection](#)
- 5 [Confidentiality](#)
- 6 [Consistency of Treatment and Fairness](#)
- 7 [Definitions](#)
- 8 [How does Menstrual health and the Menopause impact on employees at work](#)
- 9 [How to support employees with their menstrual health and going through the menopause](#)
- 10 [Menstrual Health/Menopause Champions](#)
- 11 [Help and Support](#)

# Appendices

- [Appendix 1](#) Example of support
- [Appendix 2](#) Symptoms
- [Appendix 3](#) Diagnosis
- [Appendix 4](#) Treatment Options

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Trust is committed to ensuring that all employees are treated fairly and with dignity and respect in their working environment. We are also committed to improving the wellbeing of our employees. The Trust has a duty to support employees with their menstrual health and menopause and aims to promote a greater understanding of menstrual health and menopause and seek to eradicate any exclusionary or discriminatory practices.
- 1.2 The Trust will provide appropriate information and/or support to all employees with regards to menstrual health and menopause recognising that all employees' experiences are individual. The Trust will ensure there is an environment where those individuals who are experiencing symptoms relating to their menstrual health or the peri/post/menopause feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for adjustments at work where appropriate.
- 1.3 The Trust understands the difficulties and anxieties of its employees currently experiencing these symptoms and will manage this issue by raising awareness, by training managers and colleagues so they are aware of how it can affect employees and what support employees may need.
- 1.4 This policy will provide direction and clarity on how the Trust will deal with menstrual health, the menopause and its related issues. This covers employees experiencing this natural stage of life condition; or those who are experiencing an early menopause due to medical treatment or ill health or those who are perhaps affected indirectly, for example, line managers, partners (including same sex partners) and colleagues.

# 2 Employee Health & Wellbeing

- 2.1 Throughout this policy it sets out the measures which the Trust will take to support all employees in maintaining their health and wellbeing at work. We are committed to creating an environment that promotes good mental health and where staff can thrive and feel supported. However, we recognise that whilst going through menstrual health issues and or peri/post/menopause, it can be a difficult time for all staff involved.
- 2.2 Ultimately it is the Chair of Trustees and CEH who are responsible for ensuring, so far as reasonably practicable, that the health and wellbeing of the affected employees is considered at all times and that the relevant officer(s) appointed to support employees during this time, are continuing to support the Trust wellbeing strategy.
- 2.3 The Chair of Trustees and CEH are also responsible for ensuring that the health and wellbeing of those officers responsible for supporting employees feel supported throughout the process.

### **3 Scope of the Policy**

- 3.1 The policy applies to all Trust employees. This includes employees who may have symptoms linked to menstruation which are impacting on them or employees who are going through the menopause and also potentially relatives, colleagues and carers who are supporting someone going through these stages.

### **4 Data Protection**

- 4.1 The Trust processes any personal data collected in accordance with its data protection policy. Any data collected is held securely and accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purposes of supporting employees in line with this procedure. Inappropriate access or disclosure of employee data constitutes a data breach and should be reported in accordance with the Trust's data protection policy immediately. It may also constitute a disciplinary offence, which will be dealt with under the Trust's disciplinary procedure.

### **5 Confidentiality**

- 5.1 Any discussions or documents created in line with this policy will be treated with confidentiality. However, the desire for confidentiality does not override the need for the Chair of Trustees and CEH to quality-assure the operation and effectiveness of this policy.

### **6 Consistency of Treatment and Fairness**

- 6.1 The Trustees are committed to ensuring consistency of treatment and fairness. It will abide by all relevant equality legislation, including where the duty to make reasonable adjustments applies. The Trustees are aware of the guidance on the Equality Act issued by the Department for Education.
- 6.2 This policy also complies with the following legislation:
- Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974;
  - The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992;
  - The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, GB Regulations 4;
  - Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) introduced by the Equality Act 2010 (Eng, Scotland and Wales);
  - Equality Act 2010.

### **7 Definitions**

## **7.1 Menstruation**

**7.1.1** The menstrual cycle is governed by natural changes which usually result in monthly bleeding. This process typically happens in a 28-day cycle; however, there are significant individual variations. Irregularity of the cycle can be more common in the years leading up to menopause.

Whilst many individuals have no issues with menstruation or can manage effectively there are problems which may come with menstruation which can cause difficulties for some individuals. Examples of problems associated with periods include but are not limited to; painful, heavy, irregular, stopped or missed period, endometriosis, PMS, PMDD. This policy covers common problems employees may well suffer with which may affect them at work.

## **7.2 Pre Menstrual Syndrome (PMS)**

**7.2.1** PMS (premenstrual syndrome) is the name for the symptoms individuals can experience in the weeks before their period. PMS is thought to be linked to changing levels of hormones throughout the menstrual cycle. Not everyone will suffer with symptoms of PMS. However, for others, premenstrual syndrome (PMS) symptoms may be so severe that it makes it hard to do everyday activities. Symptoms tend to recur in a predictable pattern, however, their severity can vary at different times.

## **7.3 Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD)**

**7.3.1** Some individuals may experience more severe symptoms of PMS known as premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD). Symptoms of PMDD are similar to PMS but are much more intense and can have a much greater negative impact on an individual's daily activities and quality of life. The exact causes of PMDD are unknown but it has been linked to sensitivity to changes in hormones or certain genetic variations (differences in genes) which are inherited from parents.

## **7.4 Endometriosis**

**7.4.1** Endometriosis is a condition where tissue similar to the lining of the womb grows in other places, such as the ovaries and fallopian tubes. Endometriosis can affect individuals of any age. It is a long term condition that can have a significant impact on someone's life, but there are treatments that can help.

## **7.5 Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)**

**7.5.1** Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is a common condition that affects how a woman's ovaries work.

The three main features of PCOS are:

- Irregular periods – which means your ovaries do not regularly release eggs (Ovulation)

- Excess androgen – high levels of “male” hormones in your body, which may cause physical signs such as excess facial or body hair
- Polycystic ovaries – your ovaries become enlarged and contain many fluid filled sacs (follicles) that surround the eggs (but despite the name, you do not actually have cysts if you have PCOS)

If you have at least two of these features you may be diagnosed with PCOS.

#### 7.6 **Peri-menopause:**

This is the transitional time that leads to the menopause when many individuals may experience symptoms that begin the transition to the menopause. An employee can usually tell if they are experiencing symptoms characteristic of the peri-menopause because menstrual periods start changing and they can become heavy and prolonged. The changes of the menopause transition (peri-menopause) typically begin several years before the natural menopause. This is a time when the levels of hormones produced by the ovaries fluctuate, which can lead to irregular menstrual patterns (irregularity in the length of the period, the time between periods and the level of flow) and hot flushes (a sudden warm feeling most intense in the face, neck or chest). Other changes associated with the peri-menopause and menopause nights sweats, mood swings, memory and concentration loss, trouble sleeping, tearful and fatigue.

#### 7.7 **Menopause:**

Menopause is the time when there have been no menstrual periods for 12 consecutive months. The menopause is a natural part of aging that usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 years of age, as an employee’s oestrogen levels decline. In the UK, the average for individuals to reach the menopause is 51 years of age. Around 1 in 100 individuals experience the menopause before 40 years of age. This is known as premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency. An early menopause can also be triggered for those who are experiencing ill health or medical treatment.

Surgical and medical treatments, such as a total or radical hysterectomy, fertility treatment, endometriosis and hormone therapy as part of someone’s transition to a true gender can bring about menopause symptoms. The changes involved in the body can be mild to severe and in some case the symptoms can be debilitating. Without the appropriate support many colleagues may be left feeling isolated and vulnerable.

Employees can experience both physical and psychological effects of the menopause. The changes involved only happen to women, which include non-binary, transgender and intersex (men don’t have a menstrual cycle). Some experience few or no symptoms, whilst others can have symptoms that can debilitate them. Some people can suffer such debilitating symptoms that it affects their work and the role that they do.

Lack of knowledge on the menopause can mean that someone in the workplace can be misdiagnosed as being someone who is constantly having health issues which restrict them from fulfilling their normal everyday duty/role, and they might be having time off work. That individual might be suffering in

silence afraid to approach anyone for help, and as such lose confidence, feel isolated and leave their place of employment. Recognising these changes can help in making the links between workplace health and safety and the problems some people experience working through the menopause.

Changes in oestrogen levels can result in intermittent symptoms such as fatigue, 'hot flushes', sweating, increased susceptibility to anxiety, migraines, fatigue stress and sometimes short-term memory problems. Hormonal changes associated with the menopause can also affect an individual's future health such as osteoporosis, cancer.

### **7.8 Post-menopausal:**

This is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when an employee has not had a period for 12 consecutive months. The average time for experiencing symptoms of the menopause is five years, but many experience symptoms for up to ten years and 3% will experience symptoms for the rest of their lives. Post-menopausal individuals have an increased risk of heart disease, diabetes and osteoporosis and managers should be aware of this.

## **8 How does menstrual health including menopause impact on employees at work?**

- 8.1 The effect of menstrual health and the menopause can significantly impact on an employee's physical and emotional health, how an employee does their work and their relationships with colleagues.
- 8.2 The Trust recognises its responsibility to take into account difficulties employees may experience with respect to menstrual health and menopause and will provide support and advice in this regard. The Trust recognises that symptoms may vary from individual to individual but also vary month to month.
- 8.3 The Trust recognises that some employees might not be able to take medications to ease symptoms and understands that for those with a familial or personal history of certain cancers or other health issues, medications might increase other risks, or the employee might choose not to take medication for other reasons. GPs might recommend a range of different support packages which the Trust will support wherever possible. Whilst many of the symptoms are temporary in their nature the Trust understands that they can sometimes last a long time and employees may require support during this long lasting phase.
- 8.4 If an employee is finding it difficult to cope at work because of symptoms of PMS, PMDD, and other menstrual health conditions and or menopausal symptoms, they are encouraged to speak to their line manager. Employees are urged to be as open as possible about any particular issues that they are experiencing or adjustments they may need to ensure that you are provided with the right level of support. Any health-related information disclosed during discussions will be treated sensitively and in confidence.

## **9 How to support employees with their menstrual health and menopause**

- 9.1 It is recognised that menstrual health and the menopause is a very personal experience and different adjustments, and levels of support may be needed for different individuals at different times. The Trust will provide appropriate support and adjustments when needed to help employees deal with issues arising from this.
- 9.2 The Headteacher and Trust leaders will be supportive and will be aware of menstrual health issues as well as menopausal symptoms, so that they are best equipped to support employees who may approach them and discuss how these may be affecting their health. Many employees may find it embarrassing to discuss issues of menstrual health but Headteachers and Trust leaders should encourage discussion to support employees to come forward and seek support where needed.
- 9.3 Difficulties arising from menstruation and menopause can affect employee's confidence and it can be extremely daunting and embarrassing to talk about the symptoms they are experiencing and the impact of those symptoms on day to day life and in relation to their work. It is good practice to ask all employees about any health conditions that they may have or are experiencing. This could be undertaken as part of regular one to one meetings. Any specific needs that are identified (including agreed support) should be recorded and reviewed at least annually. This could form part of the annual appraisal and contribute to the Trust's management of wellbeing. Confidentiality will be maintained when handling health information.
- 9.4 Support will need to be fully considered and implemented accordingly for employees going through difficulties with their menstrual health or menopause. This will include those diagnosed with peri-menopause symptoms, which can affect employees from their mid-30's and those suffering with post-menopausal symptoms as well as those suffering with menstruation problems which are affecting their day to day life including work. Noting that those employees suffering with difficulties in relation to menstruation could be much younger.
- 9.5 The purpose of the support is to removing barriers wherever possible that get in the way of an employee doing their job. The support should be tailored to address the barriers/issues experienced by the employee and should be identified through discussions with the employee and other experts where appropriate, such as Occupational Health. It is essential to avoid making assumptions. Appendix 1 gives some examples of support which could be considered on a case-by-case basis for those employees dealing with symptoms of menstrual health and peri/menopause
- 9.6 Leaders should consider undertaking a risk assessment for employees going through difficulties with menstruation and the menopause who are

experiencing symptoms which are affecting them. Risk assessments should consider the specific needs of employees and ensure that the working environment will not make their symptoms worse. Often, making simple changes to the working environment can help to alleviate the impact of some symptoms. Risk assessments should be reviewed regularly to make sure working environments remain safe and healthy. A risk assessment should look at issues such as: temperature and ventilation, the materials used in any uniform, access to toilet facilities and access to cold water.

Specific areas to consider are:

#### 9.7 Health and safety

- Does the employee have access to information on menstrual health and the menopause?
- Consideration of referral to Occupational Health in relation to the menopause and other menstrual issues?
- Consider a referral to coaching services in relation to their specific symptoms and coping strategies?
- Can individuals report sickness to a female manager?

#### 9.8 Sanitary and health issues

- Are workstations easily accessible to sanitary and rest facilities?
- Are private washing and changing facilities available?
- Is there access to sanitary products?
- Do rotas and shifts ensure that employees have easy access to sanitary and washing facilities?

#### 9.9 Other considerations

- Is ventilation available and is it regularly maintained?
- Is additional ventilation, for example portable fans, provided if necessary?
- Is there access to cool drinking water
- Do uniforms and PPE reflect the needs of menopausal employees and those living with PMS, PMDD or endometriosis symptoms? E.g., loose clothing, dark clothing.
- Have workstation risk assessments been reviewed to take symptoms into account?
- Are there opportunities to switch to lighter or different duties?
- Do manual handling assessments take these into account?
- Is flexibility required in relation to working hours and breaks?
- Is there natural light?
- Is time off for medical treatment or advice required?

## 10 Menstrual Health / Menopause Champions

10.1. The Trust do not yet have a menstrual health / menopause champion appointed, as soon as a champion is identified their details will be included in an updated version of this policy and details will be displayed on staffroom noticeboards. In the meantime, should you require more information or support in relation to menstrual health and or menopause please contact your Line Manager/Headteacher.

10.2 The role of a menstrual health / menopause champion is to:

- Raise awareness of menstrual health and menopause with employees
- Let employees know that there is support for anyone struggling with their menstrual health and or menopause
- Check template risk assessments cover the different stages of menstruation and menopause
- Set up support network for those affected by menstrual health and or menopause issues.
- Sign post staff to where they can access more information
- Ensure discussions about menstrual health and menopause in the workplace are handled confidentially, sensitively and with dignity and respect.
- Attend meetings with colleagues and their manager, to discuss how menstrual health and menopause is affecting them if the employee requests their support at such meetings.

## 11 Help and Support

Charities offering information and support include:

[Women's Health Concern | Confidential Advice, Reassurance and Education \(womens-health-concern.org\)](https://www.womens-health-concern.org/)

[Menopause Matters, menopausal symptoms, remedies, advice](https://www.menopausecafe.net/)

[Gather to eat cake, drink and discuss menopause \(menopausecafe.net\)](https://www.menopausecafe.net/)

[Charity for Women with POI | The Daisy Network](https://www.daisy-network.org/)

[Menopause resources for LGBTQIA+ people — Queer / LGBTQIA+](https://www.queermenopause.com/)

[Menopause \(queermenopause.com\)](https://www.queermenopause.com/)

<https://www.pms.org.uk/>

Endometriosis uk helpline 0808 808 2227

[Web Chat | Endometriosis UK \(endometriosis-uk.org\)](https://www.endometriosis-uk.org/)

[What is PMDD? - Mind](https://www.mind.org.uk/)

## Examples of support linked to menstrual health and / or menopause

In order to support those suffering from symptoms of linked to menstrual health and the menopause, they may require adjustments to enable them to remain in the workplace. Examples of possible adjustments are set out below, whether the adjustments can be accommodated will differ depending on job roles and will need to be subject of discussion between employee and the Headteacher or their line manager:

- Provide a private area or space for employees to rest/recover/make a telephone call to personal or professional support. Employees going through conditions linked to menstruation and or menopause may need to manage the impact of the symptoms, a private space to rest temporarily, cry or talk with a colleague before they return to the workplace.
- Flexibility and increased frequency in breaks. Flexibility to take breaks or rest breaks will enable employees managing symptoms to contribute more fully the workplace.
- Where possible, facilitate a comfortable working environment for those suffering with menstruation and / or menopausal, symptoms. This will include adequate drinking water supplies, temperature controlled areas, showers/washing facilities, adequate access to toilet facilities.
- Access to toilet facilities. Whilst all workers will need adequate toilet facilities particular consideration should be given to the privacy available. Employees going through the certain conditions associated with menstruation and / or menopause, may need to change into a new set of clothes and access to toilets/showers; some may experience an increased need to urinate and irregular and heavy periods. Employees going through the menopause may request to be positioned near a door or window or maybe provided with a desk fan where possible. Positioning within the office or in an area where they can get a breeze should be considered.
- Access to personal storage such as a locker. Those employees with symptoms of pms, pmdd endometriosis and or menopause may require more space as they may need to keep extra clothing etc
- Temperature, lighting and other factors can affect the general working environment. Temperature control may be a reasonable adjustment or the provision of a desk fan, when temperatures are too hot or too cold that can be controlled by the individual.
- Employees who wear a uniform may request to adjust or partly remove certain items where possible and be given access to shower facilities and be allowed to change their uniform if the need arises during the working day. Consideration of

providing a dark coloured uniform could support those employees with heavy bleeding.

- Provision of additional uniforms may be considered to ensure employees can change during the day. Natural fibres like cotton are preferable to synthetic material if an employee is experiencing hot flushes and sweating.
- Flexible working arrangements may be considered for employees that are experiencing debilitating symptoms linked to menstrual health. Menopause symptoms can increase in stressful situations and when the employee is tired, symptoms increase. This also enables employees to work productively and manage the impact of their symptoms. This may include flexibility for employees who need medical treatment or to attend clinics, hospital or appointments and also for employees seeking advice relating to the menopause. The Headteacher should consider a phased return to work for staff suffering severe symptoms. This will be beneficial for employees who are taking medication for symptoms.
- Consideration should be given for flexible working arrangement rather than the usual set times if the business needs allow this, later starts and earlier finishing times. Also adjusting a shift is a reasonable adjustment.
- Providing seating where a job role requires standing for long periods. Equally allowing an employee the opportunity to move around if their job role requires sitting or standing for long periods.
- Offering employees instructions or requests in writing rather than just verbal instructions. Some symptoms include memory loss, loss of concentration, forgetfulness so having a written record can support the employee to ensure they fulfil the tasks they are required to and can refer to it without the need to ask someone for reminders.
- Signposting employees to resources for additional support
- Providing specific equipment such as an ergonomic mouse etc

## Symptoms

### Menstruation

The most common symptoms experienced during a cycle (during or shortly before menstruation) without an underlying health condition include:

- a) blood loss;
- b) menstrual cramps/pain;
- c) mood changes;
- d) digestive changes (bloating, constipation, diarrhoea);
- e) worsening of existing muscle/joint/back pain;
- f) breast pain and/or swelling;
- g) fatigue;
- h) headaches;
- i) poor sleep quality; and
- j) temperature hypersensitivity

Most of these changes fall within the range of typical/healthy experiences and do not necessarily impact greatly on day-to-day activities.

### Pre-Menstrual Syndrome (PMS)

There are many possible symptoms of PMS, but typical symptoms include:

- feeling bloated
- breast tenderness
- mood swings
- feeling irritable
- changes to appetite
- spotty skin

Symptoms usually start and can intensify in the 2 weeks before your period, and then ease and disappear after your period starts. Not all women who have periods get PMS.

### Pre-menstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD)

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,
- mood swings
- depression,
- feeling hopeless and/or overwhelmed
- suicidal feelings
- 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 in muscles and joints.

### **Endometriosis**

The symptoms of endometriosis can vary, some individuals are badly affected, while others may not have any noticeable symptoms.

Common symptoms are:

- Pain in the lower tummy or back (pelvic pain) – usually worse during their period
- Period pain that stops participation in normal activities
- Pain when going to the toilet during a period
- Feeling sick, constipation, diarrhoea, or blood in pee or poo
- Difficulty getting pregnant
- Heavy periods

For some people the symptoms can have a big impact on their lives and can lead to other conditions such as depression.

### **Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)**

Symptoms usually become apparent during late teens and early 20s.

They can include;

- Irregular periods or no periods at all
- Difficulty getting pregnant as a result of irregular ovulation or no ovulation
- Excessive hair growth (hirsutism) – usually on the face, chest, back or buttocks
- Weight gain
- Thinning hair or hair loss from the head
- Oily skin or acne

PCOS is also associated with an increased risk of developing health problems in later life, such as type 2 diabetes and high cholesterol levels.

### **Menopause**

Most individuals going through menopause will experience menopausal symptoms. Some of these can be quite severe and have a significant impact on their everyday activities including work life.

The symptoms can affect an employee's comfort and performance at work. Common symptoms include:

- Hot flushes;
- Palpitations;
- Headaches;
- Night sweats;
- Difficulty sleeping;
- Fatigue;
- Skin irritation;
- Low mood;
- Anxiety;
- Dizziness;
- Depression;
- Problems with memory and concentration.
- Recurrent urinary tract infections;
- Joint stiffness, aches and pains;
- Heavy periods

Menopausal symptoms can begin months or even years before periods stop and last around four years after the last period, although some experience them for much longer and can need medication to alleviate the symptoms.

This Trust has a duty to provide a safe working environment for all employees and therefore commits to ensuring that adjustments and additional support are available to those experiencing menstruation or menopausal symptoms which are adversely affecting them.

## Diagnosis

### **Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD)**

It can be difficult to get a diagnosis for PMDD as it may take some time to realise that the symptoms track their menstrual cycle. PMDD is also not well known amongst health professionals. As many of the symptoms mirror symptoms of mental health conditions such as Bipolar and depression diagnosis can sometimes be missed. To help with diagnosis employees should keep a detailed record of their symptoms to help identify if there are any patterns.

### **Endometriosis**

It can be difficult to diagnose endometriosis because the symptoms can vary considerably, and many other conditions can cause similar symptoms. A GP will ask about symptoms and may ask to examine the tummy and vagina. They may recommend treatments if they think you have endometriosis. If these do not help, they might refer to a specialist called a gynaecologist for some further tests, such as an ultrasound scan, MRI or laparoscopy. A laparoscopy is where a surgeon passes a thin tube through a small cut in the tummy so they can see any patches of endometriosis tissue. This is the only way to be certain of endometriosis.

### **Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)**

A GP may arrange for a number of hormone tests to find out if excess hormone production is caused by PCOS or another hormone-related condition. An ultrasound scan may also be needed, which can show where you have a high number of follicles in your ovaries (polycystic ovaries). Blood tests can also be done to measure hormone levels.

### **Menopause**

If an employee is over the age of 45 years and has irregular periods and has symptoms of the menopause it is unlikely that an employee will need to have a blood test to diagnose menopause. If an employee is younger than 45 years, then a blood test may be offered. The blood test measures the follicle stimulating hormone in the blood known as FSH. This can confirm if the employee is going through the menopause. If unsure advice should be sought from a GP.

## Treatment options

It is vital that employees are aware of all the different treatments available and if unsure they can talk to their GP. Employees may also wish to speak to their Headteacher or line manager who could arrange for a referral to their Occupational Health provider for advice on how they can support the employee.

### Menstrual Health including PMS and PMSS

For a large number of individuals, they will not need any assistance with managing menstruation however, for others PMS or PMDD symptoms can become debilitating and require treatment. For those individuals with PMS as well as changes to your lifestyle, a GP can recommend treatments including:

- hormonal medicine – such as the combined contraceptive pill
- Cognitive behavioural therapy – a talking therapy
- antidepressants  
dietary supplements

If the individual still gets symptoms after trying these treatments, they may be referred to a specialist. This could be a gynaecologist, psychiatrist or counsellor.

There are a number of different treatments for PMDD that have been found to work for some people. The individual will decide what treatment is best together with their GP and the decision on treatment will be based on how bad the PMDD symptoms are. Examples of possible treatment options include;

- SSRI's
- Combined oral contraceptives
- Talking therapy and counselling
- Painkillers or anti-inflammatory drugs
- GnRH analogue injections
- Surgery

For trans or non-binary employees treatment options may differ if they are taking or considering taking hormone treatments. Employees in this position need to consult a GP or specialist to explore what treatment would work best for their individual circumstances.

### Endometriosis

There is currently no cure for endometriosis, but there are treatments that can help to ease the symptoms.

These include:

- Painkillers
- Hormone medicines and contraceptives
- Surgery to cut away patches of endometriosis
- Surgery to remove all or part of the organs affected by the endometriosis

### Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)

There is no cure for PCOS, but symptoms can be treated. Treatments include;

- If you are overweight, losing weight and eating a healthy balanced diet can make symptoms better
- Medicines can treat excessive hair growth, irregular periods and fertility problems
- If fertility medicines are not effective, a simple surgical procedure called laparoscopic ovarian drilling may be recommended and with treatment most women with PCOS are able to get pregnant

## **Menopause**

Some employees will not need any assistance with the menopause and they can go through this natural stage with no requirement for medical interventions. For those who do need assistance, there are a number of treatment options, these include, hormone replacement therapy (HRT), alternative medication like anti-depressants, natural treatments and changing to a healthier lifestyle which may help.

## **Hormone Replacement Therapy**

Different types of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) are available. HRT replaces the hormones that the body no longer produces because of the menopause. The 2 main hormones used in HRT are: oestrogen and progestogen. HRT involves either taking both of these hormones (combined HRT) or just taking oestrogen (oestrogen-only HRT). HRT comes in several different forms such as tablets, implants, gel, cream or patches. Employees considering HRT should talk to their GP about the suitable options, as well as possible alternatives to HRT.

## **Alternative Medications**

Anti-depressants or other medication can be given sometimes to help ease some of the symptoms such as depression and headaches.

## **Natural Treatments**

There are a number of natural products available in chemists, supermarkets, pharmacies. Employees should ask their GP or pharmacist for advice if they are thinking about using a complementary therapy.

## **Healthier Lifestyle**

Eating a balanced diet, exercise, stopping smoking and stopping drinking alcohol can all benefit your body improve your symptoms during this time. Lack of sleep, stress, unhealthy eating and unhealthy lifestyle can increase the symptoms of menopause.

## **Self-help Alternatives**

Such as strategies for managing stress, mindfulness and relaxation techniques, going for a short walk whilst at work may also help.