



March 2025

MENSTRUAL HEALTH HANDBOOK

This includes:

- Introduction
- Menstruation 101 and related conditions
- Help and supports available
- How People Leaders can help

INTRODUCTION

Why we're talking about menstrual health

AIB is committed to fostering a **Universally Inclusive** workplace, and in doing so, to supporting Menstrual Health and the related conditions by raising awareness with all employees and by providing guidance on support resources available.

This guide is intended to help anyone who is keen to understand the various aspects of Menstrual Health so they can be better able to help themselves, a team member or colleague, or to help them offer support to partners, family members, or friends.

In and outside the workplace, menstruation remains a taboo or uncomfortable subject for many, regardless of gender, which can result in employees not getting the support they need. We want to reduce the stigma of talking about periods and Menstrual Health because they are a normal part of life for a lot of people. We encourage everyone to learn more about Menstrual Health and not to shy away from talking about it. It's important that everyone, especially our People Leaders, build knowledge of the impact of Menstrual Health on employees in the workplace, in order to provide appropriate empathy and support.

Note on gender identity

While we predominantly talk about women in relation to menstruation and Menstrual Health, we recognise that it can impact some transgender and non-binary people who will require support relevant to their needs. Offering appropriate support in the workplace can help people feel included, offer dignity and respect.

What the research tells us

The FSU (Financial Services Union) has been very proactive on the topic of Menstrual Health, and ran a survey of its members in 2023. There was 1,264 respondents and 2,123 written comments which found:

- 91% of respondents believe that Menstrual Health affects working life
- Almost half are not comfortable talking about Menstrual Health at work
- 96% would welcome a Menstrual Health support guide

In 2023 CIPD published a paper, "**Menstruation and Support at Work**". Here are some of the key findings:

- 79% of respondents say they have experienced menstruation symptoms. The most common symptoms include abdominal cramps (60%), feeling irritable (52%), fatigue (49%), bloating (49%) and low mood (47%), but there are a wide range of symptoms experienced
- Those aged 18–34 are more likely to experience a high proportion of the symptoms listed compared with those aged 35–54 and 55+.

Menopause

Please note that AIB also has a Menopause handbook available to support our people available on the My HR Hub



MENSTRUATION 101 AND RELATED CONDITIONS

Menstruation/Periods

A period is the part of the menstrual cycle when a person bleeds for a few days. This usually happens about every 28 days, but it's common for periods to be more or less frequent than this. The gap between periods can range from 21 to 35 days.

Periods themselves are different for each person and can last from 2 to 7 days, but it will usually last for about 5 days. The bleeding is usually heaviest in the first 2 days.

What are the symptoms of Menstruation?

The main symptoms of menstruation are heavy bleeding and abdominal cramping. Some medical conditions cause severe or debilitating pain, severe nausea, migraines, mood swings, feeling depressed, irritability, tiredness, bloating.

It is important to note the above is not an exhaustive list of symptoms, and Menstrual Health related conditions can present themselves in various forms depending on the person.

The symptoms listed can also vary greatly among individuals, and not all people will experience all of them.

Some individuals may experience medical conditions that have severe painful menstrual symptoms such as endometriosis, or PCOS, and these conditions may require medical attention. This guide encourages employees to seek medical advice and support.

PMS (Premenstrual Syndrome)/PMT (Premenstrual Tension).

Changes in the body's hormone levels before a period can cause physical and emotional changes. This is known as PMS (premenstrual syndrome), and also known as PMT (premenstrual tension). Not all women who have periods get PMS.

There are many possible symptoms of PMS, but typical symptoms include: feeling bloated, mood swings, and feeling irritable. These symptoms usually improve after a few days.

A small number of women may experience more severe symptoms of PMS known as premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD).

(Source: HSE.ie)

Period products

At AIB we provide Riley Tampons and Sanitary pads in our bathrooms.

How Menstruation can interfere with work

Most adults are accustomed to the monthly discomfort associated with periods but from time to time may experience particularly painful cramps or other elevated symptoms such as:

- a change in energy levels,
- abdominal cramps
- nausea
- headaches
- uncomfortable bloating
- back ache

Improving your Menstrual Health experience at work

The **FSU's Stop the Stigma Campaign** recommends several things that employees can do to proactively improve their Menstrual Health experiences in the workplace.

1. Advocate for yourself: If you need support, don't be afraid to speak up and advocate for yourself.
2. Take breaks when needed: Always ensure you take your allocated breaks, and if you're experiencing discomfort or other symptoms related to your period take extra breaks when needed.
3. Connect with others: Consider connecting with other colleagues or contacting a union representative. This can help you feel less isolated and provide you with a support system to help you manage your symptoms.
4. Communicate with your People Leader It's important to have an open and honest conversation with your People Leader about your needs and how they can support you during your periods.

Other conditions

PCOS (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome)

Key facts

- Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) affects an estimated 6–13% of reproductive-aged women.
- Up to 70% of affected women remain undiagnosed worldwide.
- PCOS is the commonest cause of anovulation and a leading cause of infertility.
- PCOS is associated with a variety of long-term health problems that affect physical and emotional well-being.
- PCOS runs in families, but there are ethnic variations in how PCOS manifests itself and how it affects people.

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) affects how a person's ovaries work. It can affect many aspects of their health. It affects almost 1 in 5 people who menstruate.

PCOS can cause fertility issues and pregnancy complications. There is no cure for PCOS, but there are many treatments available.

Polycystic ovaries – what's does it mean?

Polycystic ovaries are bigger than healthy ovaries. They contain a large number of harmless follicles. The follicles are under-developed sacs that release eggs when you ovulate.

Polycystic ovaries have twice the number of follicles than healthy ovaries do. In polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), these sacs are often unable to release an egg. This means that ovulation doesn't take place each month. This can cause you to stop having periods, or to have irregular periods.

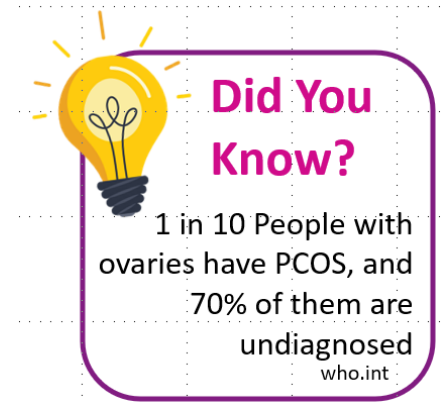
Signs and symptoms

Signs and symptoms of PCOS usually appear during late teens or early 20s.

They can include:

- irregular or light period or no periods at all
- difficulty getting pregnant
- excessive hair growth, or thinning hair/hair loss
- weight gain
- oily skin

(Source: HSE.ie)



How PCOS can interfere with work

- May need time to access medical appointments.
- PCOS also affects quality of life and can affect mental wellbeing.

Endometriosis

- Endometriosis affects roughly 10% (190 million) of reproductive age women and girls globally.
- It is a chronic disease associated with severe, life-impacting pain during periods, sexual intercourse, bowel movements and/or urination, chronic pelvic pain, abdominal bloating, nausea, fatigue, and sometimes depression, anxiety, and infertility.
- There is currently no known cure for endometriosis and treatment is usually aimed at controlling symptoms.
- Access to early diagnosis and effective treatment of endometriosis is important, but is limited in many settings, including in low- and middle-income countries.

Endometriosis is a condition where tissue similar to the lining of the womb starts to grow in other places. For example, the ovaries, the lining of the tummy and fallopian tubes.

Endometriosis can affect menstruating people of any age, although it is less likely after menopause. It is a long-term condition that can impact people on different levels. Some people who live with endometriosis can continue to lead a normal life. But for others, it can have a significant impact on their quality of life. There are treatments available that can help.

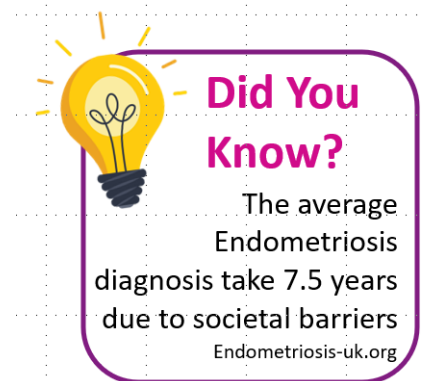
Symptoms of endometriosis

The symptoms of endometriosis can vary. Some people will have very noticeable symptoms, while others may not have any noticeable symptoms.

The most common symptoms of endometriosis are:

- Pain in your lower tummy or back (pelvic pain) in the days before your period starts and pain that usually gets worse during your period. The pain is worse than 'normal' period cramps and can be hard to control with basic pain medication
- Period pain that stops you from doing normal activities or causes you to miss social events

- Pelvic pain that also happens at other times of the month when you are not menstruating (such as midway through your cycle)
- Heavy bleeding during your period - you might use a lot of pads or tampons, or you may bleed through your clothes
- Pain during or after sex
- Pain when using the bathroom during the time of your period
- Feeling sick, constipated, having diarrhoea, or blood in your urine during your period
- Difficulty getting pregnant
- Living with these symptoms may lead to you feeling down or depressed



Did You Know?

The average Endometriosis diagnosis take 7.5 years due to societal barriers


Endometriosis-uk.org


Source: HSE.ie

How Endometriosis can interfere with work

- Pain can impact of a person’s ability to focus or even attend work.
- Can be difficult to stand up for long periods.
- May need time to access medical appointments.
- May affect productivity.


Where help and support are available:

<p>Your GP or healthcare provider</p>	<p>We always recommend you visit your GP or healthcare provider if you’re concerned about your period symptoms or want to discuss long-term health.</p>
<p>Your People Leader</p>	<p>We recognise that you may want to keep information relating to your Menstrual Health confidential, but we would encourage you to talk to your People Leader so that you can be provided with best levels of support.</p>
<p>Our EAP provider</p> 	<p>Our Staff Counselling/Employee Assistance provider is VHI. They offer 24/7, confidential support including counselling, information, guidance and referrals on any work, personal or family issue. It is 100% confidential, free of charge and no reports are sent to the Bank in relation to any discussions you have with WPO. Immediate family members can also access this service once they are over 16 years old.</p> <p>You can contact them at: Freephone ROI: 1800 995 956 Email: eap@vhics.ie Freephone UK: 0800 316 9337 Email: Adviceline@spectrum.life</p> <p>Click here for more information on our HR Hub.</p>

<p>Text HELLO to 50808 to start a conversation</p> 	<p>AIB has teamed up with the crisis text line 50808 to provide colleagues with a text support option, in addition to services provided by our Employee Assistance Programme.</p> <p>You can text T2T to the crisis text line 50808 in ROI where you will be connected with a trained volunteer who will talk to you via text about anything that is causing you distress or worry.</p> <p>Our colleagues in the UK can text SHOUT to 85258. Our colleagues in the USA can text “Home” to 741741.</p>
<p>AIB policies:</p>	<p>Our flexible working policy offers reduced hours contracts for periods from 1 month to 3 years, where it makes sense in the context of your role. Your People Leader and HRBP will review and consider all reasonable requests in line with business requirements.</p> <p>Under our AIB Sick Leave policy we provide for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Paid time off to attend clinical appointments where the medical appointment can't be scheduled outside of working hours. If possible, we would ask that you give at least 48 hours' notice when attending appointments so that arrangements can be made to cover your role. ❖ If you need extended time off for follow-up appointments, please let your people leader know so they can plan around it. ❖ If there is a medical procedure required or if you are experiencing any side effects from treatments, this is treated as sick leave once medically certified. ❖ Please ensure any absences related to severe symptoms is recorded using the designated sick leave code on HR Direct Online*. Recording this correctly on HR Online will ensure that time off due to severe symptoms, will not be counted as an occurrence for the purposes of ARP. <p>(*We are currently developing an updated sick leave code, in the interim please use absence code 0569.)</p> <p>Our Sick Leave policy allows for up to 6 months full pay and 6 months half pay in any 24-month rolling period.</p> <p>You can read the full policy here.</p>
<p>Occupational Health</p>	<p>If needed, your people leader may discuss a referral to Occupational Health with you, to help identify and agree reasonable work adjustments that will support you.</p>

External Resources

[FSU - Menstrual Health and Menopause](#)
[HSE Periods](#)
[HSE - PCOS](#)
[HSE - Endometriosis](#)
[World Health Org - PCOS](#)
[World Health Org - Endometriosis](#)
[Endometriosis Association of Ireland](#)



**AS A PEOPLE
LEADER, HOW CAN
I HELP?**

There is a lot of social stigma attached to Menstrual Health and related conditions. This means that it can be very daunting for a person to speak to their People Leader, but also that a People Leader might find themselves out of their comfort zone. The more knowledge we arm ourselves with and the more we speak about it, the more comfortable we get. This guide encourages you to learn as much as you can to help the people around you feel comfortable.

People Leaders have an important role to play when our people need to discuss health concerns, and Menstrual Health is no different in that way. Building a level of trust and safety within your team, as well as exercising empathy and compassion when approaching health issues is recommended, and this should be dialled up when discussing topics with social stigma attached like Menstrual Health.

Gender of the People Leader may also play a role as in a survey of FSU members, 1 in 5 respondents said the gender of their People Leader was the reason for not speaking about Menstrual Health at work. This means that some of our leaders will need to put extra effort into showing that their door is open to any of our people’s health concerns.

It is recommended as for all health issues, that we look out for when our people are acting out of the ordinary and raise this gently with our team members during your regular one-to-one meetings. This opens the door for discussion and encourages disclosure so that we can help improve the employee’s situation. This may not happen instantly with a team member, they may need time to consider disclosure especially when there is stigma to consider, but it will help your team member to know that they can talk about it if they choose.

As with all health conditions, including Menstrual Health condition, if an employee does disclose information to you, it is important that it is treated as confidential. If they want information about their condition to be shared, consent must be explicit. You should discuss with them who will be told and by whom, as well as the information they do or don’t want shared with colleagues.

Practical, supportive help

Discuss whether it would be helpful for the employee to visit their GP, if they haven’t already.

As a People Leader you can provide appropriate changes at work. These will be different for everyone, which is why having individual conversations and being flexible is so important. Appropriate changes can be made on a case-by-case basis, thinking about what will support the employee and the organisational requirements of their role.

Many adjustments will be simple and may vary in the time they are needed. Here are some practical steps you can take to support someone experiencing the Menstrual Health conditions at work, and help to minimise some of the most common symptoms:

Symptom	What might be helpful
Heavy or irregular periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide easy access to washroom and toilet facilities. ● Allow for more frequent breaks to go to the toilet.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider a temporary adjustment to someone’s work duties, patterns or environment. • Make sanitary products available in washrooms. • Make it easy to request extra uniforms if needed.
Headaches and fatigue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider a temporary adjustment to someone’s work duties. • Provide a quiet area to work. • Provide access to a rest room. • Offer easy access to drinking water. • Allow regular breaks and opportunities to take medication.
Cramps and pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make any necessary temporary adjustments through a review of risk assessments and work schedules. • Allow someone to move around or stay mobile, if that helps.

Some Dos and Don’ts

Your role as a People Leader is important in supporting employees and your help and support can make a world of difference:

Dos	Don’ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Learn about Menstrual Health ❖ Do talk about the Menstrual Health, in order to fight stigma and normalise it. ❖ Do approach any one-to-one conversation about Menstrual Health with sensitivity. ❖ Do consider all the ways you can offer practical support. ❖ Do make adjustments to the work environment or work patterns if you can. ❖ Do keep an open mind and be flexible. ❖ Please ensure any absences related to severe symptoms is recorded using the designated sick leave code on HR Direct Online* ❖ *We are currently developing an updated sick leave code, in the interim please use absence code 0569. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Don’t make assumptions. ❖ Don’t shy away from talking about Menstrual Health. ❖ Don’t focus on the problem, focus on solutions instead. ❖ Don’t share any personal information without consent. ❖ Don’t address poor performance without addressing health issues. ❖ Don’t offer medical advice but do suggest relevant support.

OWNERSHIP & GOVERNANCE

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Directors' names and particulars are available at the company's registered offices and on the AIB Group website.