

**SUPPORTING STUDENTS
WITH PMDD:**

**THE
PMDD
PROJECT**

A GUIDE FOR UNIVERSITIES (UK)

Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) is a premenstrual condition affecting around 1 in 20 menstruating individuals. PMDD is not premenstrual syndrome (PMS).

It is much more severe and causes intense emotional and physical symptoms that can severely impact daily life, including academic performance and overall wellbeing. Universities in the UK have a responsibility under the Equality Act 2010 to offer reasonable adjustments to students with disabilities, and PMDD can be classified as such.

This guide outlines how universities can support students with PMDD by creating an inclusive and supportive environment, offering reasonable adjustments, and promoting mental health and wellbeing.

UNDERSTANDING PMDD:

PMDD causes severe symptoms during the luteal phase (1-2 weeks before menstruation), significantly affecting a student's ability to concentrate, engage in social activities, and manage coursework.

Unlike PMS, which may cause mild discomfort, PMDD includes debilitating emotional symptoms like anxiety, depression, mood swings, and irritability, alongside physical symptoms such as fatigue, pain, and sleep disturbances.

KEY SYMPTOMS:

Anxiety
and tension

Changes in
appetite or
eating habits

Depressive
thoughts,
hopelessness,
or sadness

Difficulty
concentrating
or focusing

Extreme fatigue,
muscle/joint pain,
and headaches

Severe
mood swings,
irritability,
or anger

Sleep
disturbances

Reasonable adjustments for students with PMDD:

Under the Equality Act 2010, PMDD may be considered a disability if it substantially affects daily activities.

These adjustments ensure that students are not at a disadvantage due to their condition.

Universities must therefore consider reasonable adjustments to help affected students manage their studies and campus life.

Possible adjustments:

Flexible deadlines:

Allow students to submit coursework or assignments with extended deadlines if their PMDD symptoms impact their ability to work during the luteal phase.

Remote learning options:

Provide the option to attend lectures or seminars online if attending in person is difficult during symptomatic periods. Offering recorded lectures or notes can also help students catch up when they are not feeling well.



Exam accommodations:

Consider adjustments such as additional time, breaks during exams, or sitting exams in a private or quieter space to help reduce stress.

Modified attendance policies:

Recognise that students with PMDD may need to miss classes when symptoms are severe. Flexible attendance policies can help students manage their health without penalty.

Study breaks:

Encourage students to take study breaks and use quiet spaces on campus during difficult times. Providing designated relaxation areas or mindfulness spaces can be beneficial.



Supportive housing arrangements:

If a student lives on campus, they may benefit from living in a quieter environment or close to medical services. Consider flexible housing arrangements for students with PMDD.

CREATING A PMDD-FRIENDLY CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT



Universities can cultivate a more supportive atmosphere for students with PMDD by raising awareness, reducing stigma, and promoting mental health and wellbeing.

Awareness campaigns and education:

PMDD awareness events:

Host workshops or seminars to educate students, staff, and faculty about PMDD.

These can be organised in collaboration with medical professionals or PMDD organisations like The PMDD Project.

Staff training:

Ensure that University staff, including tutors, advisors, and support services, are aware of PMDD and how it can impact students. They should know how to respond compassionately and offer the appropriate support.

Peer support networks:

Create or promote peer support groups where students with PMDD can share their experiences, provide mutual support, and access university mental health services.

Mental health and wellbeing support:

Access to counselling services:

Ensure that students with PMDD can easily access university mental health services, including counselling and therapy. Encourage students to speak to trained counsellors about managing stress, anxiety, and mood changes related to their condition.

Physical and emotional wellbeing resources:

Offer resources such as mindfulness workshops, yoga sessions, or relaxation techniques that students can use to reduce stress and improve overall wellbeing.

ENCOURAGING OPEN COMMUNICATION

Encouraging students to communicate their needs with lecturers, tutors, or student support services is crucial for managing PMDD at University.



Establishing supportive relationships:

Open conversations:

Encourage students to speak openly with their academic advisors or disability support officers about how PMDD affects their studies.

This allows them to collaborate in finding tailored solutions.

Regular check-ins:

Create systems where students can have regular check-ins with a designated support person to assess how their condition is affecting their academic progress.

Disability services and confidentiality:

Registering with disability services:

Encourage students to register with the University's disability services to access reasonable adjustments and accommodations.

Reassure students that this process is confidential and will not affect their academic standing.

Confidentiality:

Ensure that students know their health information will be kept confidential, and only shared with relevant personnel as needed to implement adjustments.

ACADEMIC AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Providing robust support services will help students manage their academic and emotional impacts of PMDD.

Personal tutors and academic advisors:

Tailored academic support:

Encourage personal tutors or academic advisors to understand each student's specific needs or adjust coursework expectations where necessary.

Students should feel supported in balancing their studies with their health.

Guidance on managing workloads:

Offer resources or workshops on time management and managing academic stress.

Helping students break down their work into manageable tasks can reduce the overwhelm that PMDD can bring.

Mental health services:

Referral to counselling or medical professionals:

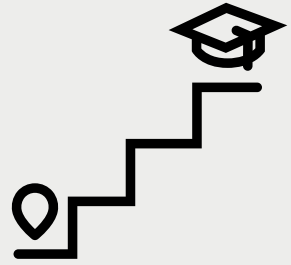
Some students may need to be referred to external medical professionals, such as a psychologist, psychiatrist, or gynaecologist, for further support with PMDD.

Ensuring a strong connection between University health services and external specialists can enhance student care.



BUILDING A PATH TO SUCCESS:

Supporting students with PMDD goes beyond offering adjustments. By cultivating a compassionate, understanding environment, universities can empower students to succeed despite their condition.



Empathy and understanding:

PMDD is a challenging condition, and students may feel frustrated or overwhelmed at times. A supportive, empathetic environment where students feel heard and valued will help them navigate the difficulties of university life with confidence.

Empowerment through education:

Provide students with the resources they need to better understand their condition and how to manage it.

This may include access to information about PMDD, self-care strategies, and external support networks.

Continued engagement:

Engage with students with PMDD regularly to ensure that the support offered is working and that they feel able to thrive in their academic environment. Open dialogue and ongoing evaluation of their needs will be key to their success.

Universities have a responsibility to create inclusive, accessible environments for all students, including those with PMDD.

By offering reasonable adjustments, promoting mental health, and encouraging open communication, Universities can ensure that students with PMDD have the opportunity to succeed academically while managing their health.

With proper support, students with PMDD can thrive and achieve their full potential at University.

Disclaimer: Everyone's menstrual cycle is unique, and not all cycles last exactly 28 days.

The information provided in this resources is meant to offer general guidance, but it's important to remember that your cycle length and phases may vary. Some cycles may be shorter or longer, and the intensity of symptoms and energy levels can differ from person to person. Always listen to your body and consult with a healthcare professional to tailor any advice to your individual needs.

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