

THE PMDD PROJECT

PMDD IN THE WORKPLACE

Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) is a hormone-based mood disorder that can significantly impact someone's ability to function at work, especially during the luteal phase (the two* weeks before their period). As a colleague or employer, your support can make a huge difference in their ability to cope with symptoms while remaining productive.

This guide provides managers, HR professionals, and employers with practical steps to create a PMDD-friendly workplace, including UK legal considerations.

UNDERSTANDING PMDD IN THE WORKPLACE

PMDD can have a profound impact on an employee's performance, attendance, and overall wellbeing.

Symptoms may include:

EMOTIONAL:

Anxiety, depression, irritability, mood swings, and panic attacks



PHYSICAL:

Fatigue, headaches, joint pain, bloating, and sleep disturbances



COGNITIVE:

Difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, and lack of motivation



Since these symptoms can fluctuate throughout the month, employees with PMDD may find it challenging to predict how they will feel day-to-day.

This unpredictability makes it important for workplaces to offer flexible and understanding support.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS: UK WORKPLACE GUIDELINES

In the UK, employers have a duty to protect the health and wellbeing of their employees, including those with long-term conditions like PMDD. Although PMDD is not officially recognised as a disability, it can be considered a disability under Equality Act 2010 if the condition has a substantial and long-term effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Under the Act, employees with PMDD may be entitled to reasonable adjustments to ensure they are not disadvantaged in the workplace.

Employers must take these obligations seriously to avoid potential discrimination claims.



HOW MANAGERS CAN SUPPORT EMPLOYEES WITH PMDD

Promote open communication:

Encourage a culture of openness where employees feel comfortable discussing their health issues, including PMDD. While employees are not required to disclose their condition, creating an environment where they know their needs will be supported can help reduce stress and promote wellbeing.

Provide a safe and confidential space for employees to discuss their health.



Be open to discussing flexible working arrangements or adjustments.



Implement reasonable adjustments:

Reasonable adjustments are changes made to an employee's work environment or duties that allow them to perform their role effectively.

For employees with PMDD, this might include:

Flexible working hours:

PMDD symptoms may vary in intensity, so allowing flexible start and finish times can help employees manage their work alongside their condition.



Remote work options:

Working from home on days when symptoms are severe can provide relief and reduce absenteeism.



Breaks:

Allowing additional breaks during the day can help employees deal with fatigue, pain, or emotional distress.



Reduced workloads during symptomatic days:

Adjusting deadlines or reducing responsibilities during the luteal phase can help employees manage stress and workload more effectively.



Encourage a supportive and PMDD-friendly workplace:

A PMDD-friendly workplace goes beyond legal compliance. It's about encouraging understanding and creating a supportive environment that prioritises employee wellbeing.

Mental health support:



Offer access to mental health support services, such as Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), counselling, or therapy. Educating staff about mental health conditions like PMDD can reduce stigma and encourage a more supportive workplace culture.

Awareness training:

Provide training for managers and HR teams on PMDD, its symptoms, and how it can affect employees. This can help ensure that managers spot the signs of PMDD in their employees, respond with empathy, and offer appropriate support.



Inclusive policies:

Review workplace policies around sickness, absence, and mental health to ensure they are inclusive of chronic conditions like PMDD. Ensure policies allow flexibility for those managing recurring health issues.



Support self-care practices:

Encourage a workplace culture that promotes wellbeing and self-care.

For employees with PMDD, this might mean:

Encouraging breaks for relaxation:

Allow time for relaxation exercises, mindfulness, or gentle movement throughout the day to help manage stress.



Access to rest areas:

Providing a quiet room for rest or a place to step away can be helpful for those experiencing fatigue or emotional distress.



Be flexible and understanding during luteal phases:

Recognise that PMDD is cyclical, and there will be times when an employee is affected more than others. Encourage them to track their symptoms and communicate any anticipated challenges.

Offer flexible scheduling:



If an employee knows their symptoms will be worse during the luteal phase, allow them to adjust their schedule in advance.

Review workloads and deadlines:

During more symptomatic phases, employees may need lighter workloads. Coordinate with them to ensure work can still be completed but in a way that aligns with their health.



Encourage employees to take sick leave if necessary:

If an employee's symptoms are severe and prevent them from working, encourage them to take sick leave rather than struggling through the day. This helps them recover more quickly and promotes a healthier work-life balance.

Supporting a colleague with PMDD is about creating an environment where they feel understood and valued, while still being able to manage their symptoms without judgement.

Reasonable adjustments, compassionate communication, and a commitment to workplace wellbeing can empower them to perform their best, even on the hardest days. By encouraging an open and supportive culture, you contribute to their wellbeing and the overall inclusivity of your workplace.

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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