

Menstrual & Menopausal WELFARE POLICY



This policy aims to provide information and guidance to managers and employees to ensure that the workplace is conducive to managing periods and menopause in a professional and effective manner.

Introduction

We at recognise the importance of providing a supportive and inclusive work environment for all employees, including those who experience periods and menopause. This policy aims to create a workplace culture that acknowledges and supports the unique challenges and needs that arise during these natural biological processes.

The purpose of this policy is to create an inclusive working environment for all employees of the organisation, by providing support for those who are experiencing problematic periods or menopausal symptoms, which can have a negative impact on their personal and working life. The policy defines periods and the menopause and provides information about the different symptoms that employees may experience during these stages. The policy also recognises that the menopause is an individual experience and that people can be affected in different ways and to differing degrees, and therefore, different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed. The ultimate goal is to improve employees' well-being at work and minimise any impact on attendance at work by creating an environment in which employees can openly and honestly initiate or engage in discussions about periods and the menopause, whether they themselves or someone they are supporting is experiencing symptoms.

Issues of absenteeism in the workplace may result in lower rates of career progression, especially for women, who either feel like they can't go for a promotion due to their health or are perceived as less dedicated due to time take off for health reasons. Equally, presenteeism (working while ill) also occurs, and results in lower rates of productivity.

Scope

This policy applies to all employees of the organisation, regardless of gender, age, or any other characteristic. All employees have the right to be informed and supported in managing their periods or menopause at work.

Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

1. Increase awareness of the impact of periods and menopause on employees' wellbeing and work performance.
2. Provide guidance to managers on how to manage employees who experience periods or menopause.
3. Provide guidance to employees on how to manage their periods or menopause at work.
4. Create a supportive and inclusive workplace that recognises the needs of employees who experience periods or menopause.
5. Reduce stigma, discrimination, and embarrassment related to periods and menopause at work.

Definition

Menstruation is a normal part of the menstrual cycle that results in bleeding out of the vagina every 28-40 days as the body sheds its uterine lining. Menstruation typically occurs between the ages of 12-45 in people who have a uterus.

Perimenopause is when you have symptoms before your periods have stopped completely. Symptoms can start seven years before your periods stop.

Menopause is when a person stops having a period due to lower hormone levels as a natural part of ageing. While this can occur any time between the ages of 45-55, the average age of menopause in Ireland is 51.

List of symptoms

Menstruation

- heavy bleeding
- feeling depressed or irritable
- migraines and headaches
- tiredness
- bloating
- abdominal cramping
- breast tenderness
- severe nausea
- acne

Menopause and perimenopause

- night sweats
- fatigue
- brain fog, problems with memory and concentration
- lack of energy
- low mood or anxiety
- heart palpitations (a fast-beating, fluttering or pounding heart)
- recurring UTIs
- loss of muscle and overall weight gain
- vaginal dryness and decreased libido

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.

It's also important to note that some individuals may experience more severe symptoms that may require medical attention. This policy encourages employees to seek medical advice and support if necessary.

Policy guidelines

- **Education and training:** The organisation will provide information and training to managers and employees on periods and menopause. The training should include information on the impact of periods and menopause on employees, the symptoms and effects, and how to better manage them at work.
- **Support for employees:** The organisation will provide support to employees who experience periods or menopause. This can include flexible working arrangements where suitable, access to rest facilities, and access to appropriate sanitary products. Managers should be aware of and sensitive to the needs of employees and provide suitable support where necessary.
- **Accommodations:** The organisation will make reasonable accommodations to assist employees who experience periods or menopause. Accommodations can include a private space for changing sanitary products, access to drinking water, and access to cooler air or fans.
- **Confidentiality:** The organisation will maintain the confidentiality of employees who experience periods or menopause. Employees should be able to discuss their needs and symptoms with their managers or a designated staff member in a confidential manner.
- **Anti-discrimination:** The organisation will not tolerate any form of discrimination, harassment, or bullying related to periods or menopause or for anyone accessing these supports. Any employee found to be engaging in such behaviour will be subject to disciplinary action.
- **Review and evaluation:** The organisation will regularly review and evaluate this policy to ensure that it remains relevant and effective in meeting the needs of employees who experience menstruation or menopause.

Action points for managing staff

Managers can take a number of steps to support employees going through periods and menopause. Here are some guidelines:

- **Create a supportive and inclusive workplace culture** – this can involve promoting an open and positive attitude towards periods and menopause, encouraging communication and understanding, and challenging any stigma or negative attitudes.
- **Be proactive in initiating discussions with employees** – managers can take the lead in initiating conversations with employees about any issues or concerns they may have related to periods and menopause. They can also offer support and advice on any available resources and benefits.
- **Be understanding and flexible** – managers should be understanding and flexible towards employees experiencing symptoms of periods and menopause, such as allowing for more frequent breaks, adjustments to working hours or conditions, and providing access to supportive resources.
- **Provide access to relevant resources and support** – managers should be knowledgeable about the available resources and support for employees going through periods and menopause. This can include access to healthcare professionals, employee assistance programs, or other relevant support services.
- **Maintain confidentiality and privacy** – managers should respect the privacy of employees going through periods and menopause, and ensure that any personal information is kept confidential and not shared with others without the employee's consent.

By taking these steps, managers can help create a supportive workplace environment that enables employees going through periods and menopause to manage their symptoms and continue to contribute to the organisation productively.

Action points for employees

There are several things that employees can do to improve their periods and menopause experience in the workplace:

- **Advocate for yourself:** If you're not getting the support you need, don't be afraid to speak up and advocate for yourself. This could mean requesting specific accommodations, or talking to your HR department about what support is available.
- **Take breaks when needed:** If you're experiencing discomfort or other symptoms related to your periods or menopause, take breaks when needed. This could mean stepping away from your desk for a few minutes to stretch, taking a quick walk outside, or finding a quiet place to relax.
- **Practice self-care:** Self-care is important for managing the symptoms of periods and menopause. This could include things like staying hydrated, eating a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, and practicing stress-reducing techniques like meditation or deep breathing exercises.
- **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 and request suitable working arrangements.
- **Communicate with your manager:** It's important to have an open and honest conversation with your manager about your needs and how they can support you during your periods and menopause. Let them know what accommodations you may need, such as flexible work hours or a more comfortable work environment.

Workplace supports to be provided

1. **Flexible scheduling**
Where possible, the organisation will provide flexible scheduling for employees who experience periods or menopause-related symptoms. This includes the option to work from home or to adjust work hours as needed to accommodate physical discomfort, fatigue, or other symptoms.
2. **Improved training for line managers and supervisors**
Greater understanding would alleviate the barriers people often face in raising, and in many cases, explaining in detail what they are going through to their supervisors, while also providing guidance and a framework on how the supervising staff can best help and accommodate the employee. Contact Fórsa or a union representative to help arrange training seminars on the same.
3. **Access to free menstrual and menopause products**
The company will ensure that menstrual products and menopause-related products (such as sanitary products or pain relievers) are available in all restrooms, and that these products are free of charge. Employees should also have the option to request additional products, such as specific types of menstrual products or specialised cooling pads.
4. **Accommodations for physical needs**
The company will make reasonable accommodations to support employees who experience physical discomfort or symptoms related to periods and menopause. This may include providing ergonomic workstations, adjustable chairs, or other equipment that can alleviate pain or discomfort.
5. **Access to risk assessments when required**
Risk assessments consider the specific needs of menstruating and menopausal workers and ensure the working environment will not make their symptoms worse. Issues that need consideration include temperature and ventilation. The assessments should also address welfare issues, such as toilet facilities and access to cold drinking water. Improved welfare facilities could also include a quiet place to rest and easily adjustable temperature and humidity controls.

6. **Supportive culture**

The company will work to create a culture that supports employees who experience periods and menopause. This includes providing education and training to all employees on the biological processes, as well as fostering an environment where employees feel comfortable discussing their needs and seeking support from their colleagues and supervisors.

7. **Confidentiality and privacy**

The company recognises that periods and menopause are personal and private experiences, and will ensure that all employees' privacy and confidentiality are respected. Any information about an employee's menstrual cycle or menopause-related symptoms will be kept confidential and not disclosed to anyone without the employee's explicit consent.

8. **Paid time off**

The company will provide, where possible, paid time off for employees who require time off due to periods or menopause-related symptoms. This time off will not count against an employee's sick or vacation time, and will be considered a reasonable accommodation under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005.

Conclusion

This organisation is committed to providing a work environment that is conducive to managing periods and menopause in a professional and effective manner. Managers and employees are encouraged to familiarise themselves with this policy and to seek guidance or support as necessary.

Fórsa trade union's research revealed only 1% of employees have the protection of a menstrual health policy in their workplace in Ireland, although an enormous majority - 96% - favoured the introduction of such a policy in their own workplace, displaying the urgent need and demand for the introduction of the same.

Employers already have statutory duties to provide and maintain facilities and arrangements for the welfare of their employees at work under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005. A failure to support people affected by menstrual and menopausal symptoms may contravene certain equality laws, such as age, gender, and sex discrimination.

Signature of HR official

Date policy agreed.....