

Employer's Guide to PMDD

(Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder)



What is PMDD?

PMDD (Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder) is a hormone based mood disorder which affects around 1 in 20 women and AFAB individuals of reproductive age. It can cause severe emotional, professional, and personal harm to those who have it, due to extreme psychological symptoms which occur before their period every month. Some also suffer from additional physical symptoms as part of their PMDD.

Sufferers report damaging and impulsive behaviours that may include suddenly leaving a job or a relationship. **15% of people with PMDD will attempt suicide.**

PMDD is thought to be caused by a severe negative reaction to the natural rise and fall of oestrogen and progesterone. It is thought to be a genetic disorder with symptoms often worsening over time and around reproductive events including pregnancy, birth, miscarriage and perimenopause.



Why is PMDD a workplace issue?

Symptoms can make work incredibly difficult. Women report **difficulty in concentrating, self-doubt, paranoia, fatigue, tearfulness, a heightened sensitivity to the environment and people, outbursts**, and finding **social interaction** particularly difficult during their premenstrual "episode" phase.

After symptoms disappear (around the onset of their period) many women report **feelings of guilt**, which can lead to **over-compensatory behaviours** such as working longer hours, taking on too much, setting unrealistic targets and taking work home.

Women with PMDD alternate between this 'good' and 'bad' state every month, which can have a long term impact on their overall health and wellbeing. As a result, women are leaving the workforce (voluntarily and involuntarily) sometimes giving up on their career entirely. Therefore, employers need better awareness and support mechanisms in place for helping female employees with the condition.



What do I need to do as an employer?

Due to the chronic and repetitive nature of the condition, PMDD is classed as a disability under the Equality Act 2010. This means that reasonable adjustments should be made to help employees with PMDD. Failure to do so may result in an employment tribunal on the grounds of discrimination.



Disclosure of PMDD

Disclosure is frequently cited as one of the most challenging aspects of having a condition such as PMDD, especially in relation to employment. Whether or not a person discloses the condition is entirely their choice. However, without this information, reasonable adjustments can not be put in place, which may have a long term impact on the employee. To create an inclusive environment and encourage disclosure, you could:

- Provide staff (especially Managers and HR members) with PMDD awareness training
- Ensure staff have access to good support services, including occupational health
- Ensure staff are aware of the support available to them
- Encourage managers to hold regular (one to one) catch-ups with staff, with a focus on wellbeing
- Have clear procedures in place for when someone discloses PMDD and follow them
- Inform the person of what will happen following a disclosure and keep them updated
- Signpost staff to external care providers for additional support
- Make diversity commitments visible to staff and celebrate achievements of initiatives
- Acknowledge PMDD awareness month (April)



Making reasonable adjustments

An employer has to make adjustment when they are aware (or could be expected to know) that an employee has PMDD. It is important to remember that each person with the condition will experience PMDD differently. Therefore, **understanding the specific needs of the individual is critical.**

You should hold a meeting with the member of staff to discuss what can be done to help them. You may find it helpful to start with:

- Finding out more about the condition and its typical effects on someone at work
- Finding out what makes their PMDD symptoms better or worse at work
- Looking at their absence level compared to colleagues
- What could be changed to make a positive difference?

- a) Reallocating tasks
- b) Temporary change of duties or responsibilities
- c) Reduced hours
- d) Home working
- e) Something else?



Occupational health involvement

If you have concerns about an employee's health and safety at work, or need a formal assessment of whether PMDD affects her ability to carry out day to day tasks, you will need an occupational health report. Whilst a GP can certify that an employee suffers from PMDD, they have a limited ability to help with what adjustments might be useful at work.

However, not all occupational health consultants are familiar with PMDD and it is often necessary for various medical practitioners to work together (with your employee's consent) to collect the appropriate data and make practical recommendations.



Supportive policies and practices for employees with PMDD

- Enable working from home, reduction in hours or relief from some responsibilities to prevent having to take time off sick during the PMDD episode
- Allow the employee time away from work to attend clinical appointments, without having to use their annual leave
- Consider PMDD absence as separate to sickness/illness, in order to prevent the person from being penalised by strict absence measures e.g. Stage 1, 2 and 3 trigger policies
- Allow the person to wear loose clothing (if there is a uniform policy)
- Provide a quiet place for the person to work or take time out
- Allow regular breaks
- Allow a gradual return to work after periods of absence relating to PMDD



Further information

International Association for Premenstrual Disorders	www.iapmd.org
Vicious Cycle: Making PMDD Visible	www.facebook.com/viciouscyclepmdd
National Association of Premenstrual Syndromes	www.pms.org.uk
See Her Thrive	www.seeherthrive.com

References

Hardy, C., & Hardie, J. (2017). Exploring premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) in the work context: a qualitative study. *Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics & Gynaecology*, 38(4), 292-300.

Public Health England. (2018). What do women say? Reproductive health is a public health issue. Retrieved from <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/u>

The Work Foundation. (2017). More than "women's issues": women's reproductive and gynaecological health and work. Retrieved from http://www.theworkfoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/419_MoreThanWomensIssues.pdf