

**Menstrual Health Policy**

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3. **Introduction**

1.1 PEEK aims to be a supportive employer. As part of its commitment to good employment practice, PEEK is keen to help its team members to balance the demands of work and life wherever possible. The aim of this policy is to raise awareness of menstrual health, the related issues and how this can affect team members; to break the stigma and taboo surrounding menstrual health at work; to support team members to remain at work; and to promote an environment in which team members feel confident in discussing menstrual issues and ask for support and adjustments, if required.

1.2 This policy therefore provides guidance and direction for those team members experiencing menstrual health issues and those who may be affected indirectly including managers and colleagues. This document seeks to inform of the potential symptoms of menstrual health; how symptoms can affect team members; and what can be done to support individuals including reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

1.3 By implementing this policy, PEEK aims to strike a reasonable balance between the pursuit of its organisations needs and the genuine needs of team members. This policy is designed to be as comprehensive as possible however PEEK recognises that menstrual health affect all people differently and will consider each case individually.

1.4 In order to be gender-inclusive, PEEK recognise that any woman or person with a uterus can experience menstrual health and will refer to ‘you’ or ‘they/them’ throughout this document.

**2. Menstrual Health**

2.1 In the UK, 1 in 3 women or people with a uterus will experience a reproductive or gynaecological health issue in their lifetime. The UK has the largest gender health gap in the G20. On average, women receive poorer healthcare than men, wait longer to be diagnosed for many conditions and are more likely to wrongly have their physical symptoms ascribed to mental health issues. Research also shows female, non-binary and trans patients feel less listened to by their healthcare professionals than male patients.

2.2 PEEK is committed to raising awareness of menstrual health, the related issues and how this can affect team members. This policy refers to a limited number of recognised menstrual health conditions but it does not intend to provide an overview of all menstrual health conditions due to the complexity and variety of such conditions. Instead PEEK offers a commitment to our team that we will listen to and act accordingly to support any individual experiencing poor menstrual health.

**3. Periods and the Menstrual Cycle**

3.1 The menstrual cycle is the monthly series of changes the body goes through in preparation for the possibility of pregnancy. The average menstrual cycle lasts anywhere between 21-35 days and begins on the first day of your period. An average period lasts between 2-7 days. The average age of first period is 12. For many, periods are manageable and do not have a significant impact on day to day life, however symptoms can vary month to month and almost all will experience some symptoms of premenstrual syndrome (PMS) in their lifetime.

3.2 Period poverty is a lack of access to sanitary products to hygienically manage menstruation, usually due to financial constraints. Period poverty has increased in the UK over recent years. Scotland was the first country to introduce free sanitary products in public places including schools, colleges and local authority buildings such as libraries and community centres. To support our team members, PEEK provides sanitary products including sanitary pads, tampons and panty-liners in the women’s toilets of our office, the Legacy Hub. Any other products e.g. menstrual cups, reusable pads, etc. may be requested.

**4. Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)**

4.1 It is estimated that 1 in 5 women/people with a uterus of reproductive age suffer with heavy menstrual bleeding and premenstrual syndrome (PMS). It is widely recognised that heavy bleeding and PMS can affect both physical and mental health.

4.2 Symptoms of periods and PMS include but are not limited to;

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Painful cramps
 | * Reduced concentration
 |
| * Tiredness
 | * Changes to appetite
 |
| * Insomnia
 | * Dizziness
 |
| * Low mood
 | * Aches and pains including breast pain
 |
| * Mood swings
 | * Bloating
 |
| * Headaches
 | * Brain fog e.g. blanks and forgetfulness
 |
| * UTI infections
 | * Loss of/lower sex drive
 |

**5. Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD)**

5.1 PMDD is a very severe form of premenstrual syndrome (PMS) which can occur during 1-2 weeks before a period is due. Experiencing PMDD can make it difficult to work, socialise and have healthy relationships and in some cases, can also lead to suicidal thoughts.

5.2 Symptoms of PMDD include but are not limited to;

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Severe mood swings
 | * Breast tenderness or swelling
 |
| * Low energy
 | * Aches and pains
 |
| * Feeling upset or tearful
 | * Headaches
 |
| * Feelings of hopelessness
 | * Severe bloating
 |
| * Suicidal feelings
 | * Changes to appetite, such as overeating
 |
| * Extreme tiredness
 | * Insomnia
 |
| * Feeling angry or irritable
 | * Feeling overwhelmed or out of control
 |
| * Feeling anxious
 | * Reduced concentration
 |
| * Feeling tense or on edge
 | * Feeling overwhelmed or out of control
 |

**6. Endometriosis**

6.1 Endometriosis is a long term condition where tissue similar to the lining of the womb is found elsewhere in the body. The cause of endometriosis is unknown and there is no specific cure, however it is estimated that endometriosis affects around 1.5 million people in the UK. In Scotland it takes, on average, 8.5 years from the onset of symptoms to receive a diagnosis. The average age of endometriosis sufferers is 18-35. Recent studies suggest that endometriosis is one of the most painful chronic conditions to live with and has a significant impact on the physical and emotional wellbeing of individuals.

6.2 Symptoms of endometriosis include but are not limited to;

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Very heavy periods
 | * Pain while using the toilet
 |
| * Pain during or after sex
 | * Experiencing blood in urine
 |
| * Sever period pain and/or cramping that stops the individual doing normal activities
 | * Feeling sick or experiencing constipation or diarrhoea during a period
 |
| * Suicidal feelings
 | * Low mood/depression
 |
| * Extreme fatigue
 | * Severe boating
 |
| * Mild to severe pain in the stomach, groin or back (pelvic pain) – usually significantly worse during a period
 | * Difficulty getting pregnant or maintaining a pregnancy
 |

**7. Other Menstrual Health Concerns**

7.1 This policy supports the widely held view that menstrual health is a far under-researched and under-recognised area of medical study. PEEK will update this policy as and when required to reflect the most up to date information and advice.

7.2 As an organisation we are committed to treating the concerns and experiences of all team members on an individual basis and will act appropriately to support team members where and when possible.

7.3 Menopause is not considered in this policy. For more information, please refer to PEEK’s Menopause Policy.

7.3 Any menstrual health concerns not mentioned in this policy have not be ignored or deliberately omitted. Team members are encouraged to bring any concerns to their line manager or member of the Senior Management Team.

**8. Management of Menstrual Health**

8.1 Menstrual health can be positively managed for many. These methods of management may include but are not limited to;

* **Use of accessible painkillers** including paracetamol, ibuprofen, etc;
* **Use of hot compresses** e.g. hot-water bottles, heat-pads, etc;
* **Regular exercise** to help ease pain, strengthen bones, boost mood and help with sleep;
* **Smoking cessation**;
* **Changes to diet**, primarily reducing the intake of spicy food, caffeine and alcohol:
* **Stress awareness**, including lowering levels of stress where possible, can help with physical and mental health symptoms;
* **Cognitive-behavioural therapy** can be used to improve low mood, anxiety and stress but also insomnia or brain fog;
* **Use of period tracker apps** to track menstrual cycle and symptoms.
1. **Reasonable Adjustments**

9.1 In order to create a more comfortable workplace environment for people experiencing menstrual health issues or illnesses, PEEK is committed to implementing a variety of steps listed below.

9.2 In any occasion a team member feels they are not adequately supported or that they are unfairly treated due to their menstrual health experiences, they should raise their concern with an appropriate senior member of the team or follow PEEK’s Disciplinary and Grievance procedures.

9.3 If it is found that any team member has treated a member of the team who is experiencing menstrual health issues or illness in an unfair or discriminatory manner, they may be subject to disciplinary action.

**10. Raising Awareness and Understanding:**

10.1 Menstrual health affects all women and people with uterus’ but many people have a limited understanding of its day to day impact. To reflect this, the organisation as a whole as well as line managers will:

* Learn more about menstrual health, understanding what it is and what the symptoms might be and how poor menstrual health may impact team members;
* Listen to team members in order to understand how menstrual health is affecting them individually and what measures could support them at work;
* Provide words of support and encouragement in line with PEEK’s values to help team members experiencing the poor menstrual health to feel valued, respected and empowered;
* Ask how they and PEEK as an organisation can help and what they need in order to work;
* Challenge discriminatory language or jokes regarding menstrual health;
* Pursue disciplinary action where appropriate where it is found that a team member has been discriminated against;
* Ensure menstrual health and its impact are discussed within the Health and Wellbeing Working Group to ensure the wider team have a basic understanding.

**11. Flexible working:**

11.1 Difficulty sleeping, memory loss and brain fog are common symptoms of poor menstrual health. To reflect this, as well as the impact of other common symptoms mentioned below, the organisation aims to facilitate flexible working wherever possible. Requests for flexible working may include:

* A change to the pattern of hours worked;
* Working from home or hybrid working;
* A reduction in working hours;
* More frequent breaks;

11.2 Team members should formally discuss such requests with their line manager and/or the Head of People and Programmes. Depending on the circumstances, such requests may be approved on a permanent or temporary basis. If it is not possible for requests to be approved, a specified reason must be offered and other supportive measures should be considered.

**12. Psychological Support:**

12.1 People experiencing poor menstrual health may suffer from memory loss, mood swings, reduced concentration and bouts of depression and/or anxiety. To reflect this, PEEK will:

* Allow extra time to relax and practice mindfulness during the working day;
* Ensure flexible working arrangements where appropriate;
* Provide space and encouragement to discuss concerns with occupational health, line manager and/or Health and Wellbeing Working Group;
* Refer team member to Employee Assistance Programme and/or Life Link where appropriate.

**13. Heavy and irregular periods:**

13.1 Heavier than typical bleeding and irregular periods are common symptoms. To reflect this, PEEK will:

* Ensure all team members experiencing poor menstrual health will have the option to work from home on an ad hoc basis or using a hybrid model;
* Provide a range of sanitary products in communal toilets;
* Ensure easy access to toilets;
* Cover costs to clean furniture e.g. chairs soiled by blood, ensuring this is managed in a discreet and dignified manner.

**14. Aches and pains:**

14.1 Muscle, breast, bone and joint pain are typical symptom of menstrual health. To reflect this, PEEK will:

* Provide supportive furniture or aids to make the workplace more comfortable, e.g. an ergonomic office chair, sitting/standing adjustable desk, foot rest, wrist rests, etc;
* Allow extra time to stretch and move during the working day;
* Conduct individual risk assessments to review job responsibilities and, where appropriate, reduce or remove responsibilities which cause discomfort and/or pain.

**15. Fatigue and headaches:**

15.1 Those experiencing poor menstrual health may experience tiredness and headaches, ranging from minor to severe. To reflect this, PEEK will:

* Ensure all team members have the option to work from home on an ad hoc basis or using a hybrid model;
* Consider flexible working requests;
* Provide a quiet office working environment with access to natural lighting;
* Provide running water in the communal kitchen.
1. **Sickness**

16.1 If a team member is unable to work due to symptoms of the poor menstrual health, they should refer to the Sickness Policy and follow the organisations procedures for reporting absence from work.

16.2 PEEK offer company enhanced sick pay in accordance with the following tier system. Thereafter Statutory Sick Pay applies:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Continuous Service**  | **Maximum Payment in any rolling 12 month period**  |
| After 6 months’ probation  | 2 working weeks full pay and 2 working weeks half pay |
| After 2 years’ service | 3 working weeks full pay and 3 working weeks half pay |
| After 3 years’ service | 4 working weeks full pay and 4 working weeks half pay |
| After 5 years’ service | 5 working weeks full pay and 5 working weeks half pay |
| After 10 years’ service | 6 working weeks full pay and 6 working weeks half pay |

16.3 PEEK may request medical information on occasion.

**17. Other Health Concerns**

17.1 This policy also takes in to account other health concerns which impact women and people with uterus’ including fertility treatments, pregnancy and postpartum care and miscarriages. PEEK recognises that every persons journey is different and is committed to supporting team members on a case by case basis.

**18. Fertility**

18.1 PEEK aims to support all team members who are undergoing fertility treatment including IUI and IVF, surgery and medication.

18.2 Team members undergoing treatment should share this information with their line manager so the organisation can provide appropriate support. This support may include paid time off for treatment and recovery in line with our Sickness Policy. In such cases, team members may be asked to share medical information such as appointment cards.

18.3 Other support may include:

* Consideration of Flexible Working requests to allow team members to attend appointments;
* Space and privacy to make or accept sensitive phone calls during working hours;
* Space and privacy to administer medication;
* Consideration of last minute annual leave requests, etc.

18.4 PEEK recognise that all fertility journeys are different and we are committed to supporting all team members in a way that is more suitable and appropriate for them, tailored to individual needs and wants.

**19. Pregnancy and Postpartum Care**

19.1 Menstrual health may also apply to the stage in a person’s lifecycle wherein they experience pregnancy, have a baby and experience postpartum healthcare. For more information, please refer to PEEK’s Maternity Policy.

19.2 However, in summary, team members with more than 26 weeks service and less than two years’ service at the time of conception are entitled to Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP). Those with more than two years’ service at the time of conception are entitled to 19 working weeks full pay, 20 working weeks SMP and 7 working weeks unpaid. In such circumstances, a Company Enhanced Pay Agreement should be signed by both the team member and a representative of the Senior Management Team.

19.3 All pregnant team members are entitled to time off during their normal working hours to receive pregnancy care although, whenever it is possible to do so, they should arrange appointments at the start or end of the working day, avoiding PEEK’s core hours of 10am–4pm. The team member should provide as much notice as is reasonably practical to their line manager of any appointments. Pregnancy, or antenatal, care includes appointments with a midwife, GP, hospital clinics and relaxation or parent craft classes, if these are advised by a GP, midwife or health visitor. Team members will be paid as normal for antenatal care, including any time spent travelling to and from and waiting for the appointment.

19.4 All new mothers and parents will be supported wherever possible to breastfeed while at work and/or take any required time off work should they experience any poor health postpartum in accordance with our Sickness Policy, including postpartum/postnatal depression.

19.5 PEEK recognise that all fertility journeys are different and we are committed to supporting all team members in a way that is more suitable and appropriate for them, tailored to individual needs and wants.

**20. Miscarriage**

20.1 For more information, please refer to PEEK’s Miscarriage Policy. All PEEK team members are entitled to take up to two weeks’ off work at full pay if they or their partner experiences a miscarriage. A miscarriage is defined as the loss of a pregnancy within the first 23 weeks. Thereafter, if a pregnancy is lost or a child(ren) is still born, the Parental Bereavement Policy applies. Please see this policy for more information.

20.2 PEEK recognise that all fertility journeys are different and we are committed to supporting all team members in a way that is more suitable and appropriate for them, tailored to individual needs and wants.

**21. Support Services**

21.1 The health and wellbeing of team members is of upmost importance to PEEK. To support team members through any hardships in work and/or in their personal lives, PEEK has an Employee Assistance Programme provided through Peninsula UK.

21.2 The EAP is available 24/7 and is a free and confidential service and can provide support on a wide range of topics including mental health, addiction, relationships and financial matters. All team members are encouraged to contact 0800 047 4097.

21.3 PEEK will at all times act with sensitivity and will provide reasonable support wherever possible.

21.4 External sources of help and support for team members and managers are also available, including:

* [NHS](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/periods/) which provides general tips and advice on managing menstrual health.
* [Always](https://always.com/en-us/tips-and-advice) which provides general tips and advice on managing periods.
* [Mind UK](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/premenstrual-dysphoric-disorder-pmdd/for-friends-and-family/) which provides information about the PMDD, symptoms and treatment options.
* [Endometriosis](https://www.endometriosis-uk.org/) UK which provides advice and guidance on living with endometriosis.

**22. Links to other policies:**

* Maternity Policy
* Miscarriage Policy
* Shared Parental Leave Policy
* Parental Bereavement Policy
* Menopause Policy
* Equal Opportunities Policy
* Sickness Policy
* Employee Handbook
* Disciplinary Policy
* Grievance Policy

Date Approved:

Approved by:

Next Review Date:

Possibilities for Each and Every Kid PEEK

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