

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT GUIDE FOR FIRST AIDERS IN THE WORKPLACE





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PART 1: MENSTRUATION

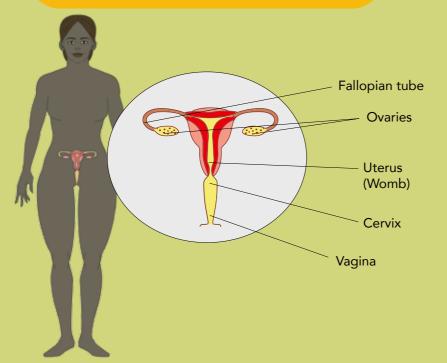


I. MENSTRUATION AND THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE

What is menstruation?

Why does menstruation happen?

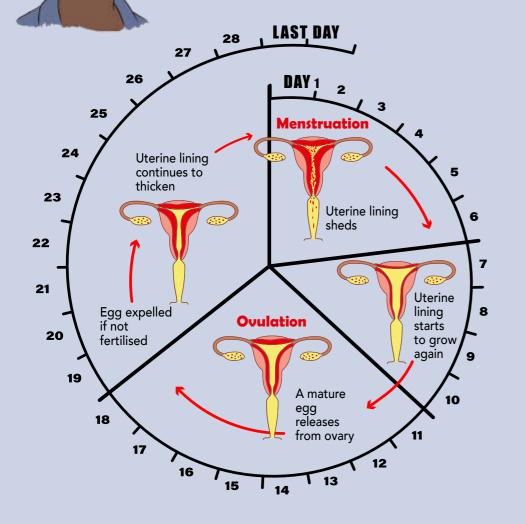
Menstruation is a natural process that happens among most non-pregnant women approximately every month from puberty until menopause. It is when blood and tissue flow out of the vagina. This process is also referred to as the time when a woman gets her "period".



Women who menstruate go through a menstrual cycle every month to get the body ready for a possible pregnancy. During each cycle, an ovum (egg) develops and is released from the ovaries. While the egg moves into the fallopian tube, the lining of the uterus builds up for a possible pregnancy. If the egg is fertilized by an active sperm, it will attach to the lining of the uterus and grow into a foetus. If the egg is not fertilized, it is shed with the uterine lining as menstrual blood, and the body prepares itself for the next egg.



How long does a menstrual cycle last?



The average length of a menstrual cycle is 28 days, but this timing can differ from person to person and can change in one person over time. The process of menstruation, when the uterine lining and egg are discarded as blood, can last between 2-7 days and the amount of blood can be less on some days and more on others. It's important to recognize variations in menstrual experiences and avoid generalizing one person's experience with others.



Do older women experience menstruation differently from younger women?

Yes! Whether younger or older, our bodies are constantly going through changes.





I've heard about menopause. What is it?



This is when your body approaches the end of its reproductive years and menstruation gradually stops.

How does a woman know if she's going through menopause?

She'll begin to notice irregular menstruation or absence of menstruation. Some common symptoms include hot flashes, difficulty sleeping, or bladder problems. These symptoms can affect one's ability to work at their best.



II. MENSTRUATION AT WORK

For women to manage their menstrual health and hygiene with dignity, they need:



Awareness, information and self-confidence regarding their menstrual health and hygiene.



Access to safe, hygienic and absorbent products, either on site or for an affordable price near their workplace.



Access to safe and clean facilities that are equipped with clean water, soap and proper disposal of menstrual products.



A supportive workplace environment that enables them to manage menstruation without fear.





- 2 billion people around the world menstruate. Many of them also menstruate while at work.
- Women in the workplace feel pressured to be silent about their menstruation.
- Talking about menstruation doesn't make any employee an attention-seeker, unprofessional, lazy, or immature.

TIPS

Encourage menstruating employees to:

- Track the start date and duration of their menstrual cycles to understand the frequency of their periods and prepare accordingly.
- Choose menstrual products based on their menstrual flow and how frequently they can change products at work.
- 🤄 Carry backup menstrual products, painkillers, and clothes.





PART 2: PROMOTING DIGNIFIED MENSTRUATION AT WORK



I. HOW CAN FIRST AIDERS PROMOTE DIGNIFIED MENSTRUATION AT WORK?

Reduce menstrual stigma with accurate information



Are periods dirty and shameful?



Menstruation or menstrual blood is not dirty, unhygienic, or shameful. Many people think that menstruation removes dirt from the body and that menstrual blood is impure, but this is not true. It is a natural biological process.

Address the culture of shame and silence around menstruation



I feel ashamed when I ask my experienced colleagues about how to use a reusable pad or request lighter duties from my supervisor when my menstrual pain is really bad.

Like you, many women don't talk about their menstruation-related needs at work due to shame. They bear their discomfort and pain silently, which isn't fair. Periods don't pause in the workplace, so we should not shame employees who are menstruating.



Provide guidance on menstrual pain



Does everyone experience pain when they have their periods?

Pain related to menstruation is called cramping or cramps, and it usually manifests in the lower abdominal area either before or during menstruation. Some people experience little to no pain, while others might be quite uncomfortable.



Is it okay to take painkillers at work when my period pain is too much?

Yes! Many women might need medication to manage their menstrual pain.







How can I prevent staining my clothes at work when I bleed? I'm worried that others will find out that I'm menstruating.

Many employees, like you, are worried that their colleagues will judge them or make fun of them if they are menstruating. There is nothing wrong with menstruating or accidentally staining your clothes. If you use menstrual products that are safe, comfortable, and good at absorbing blood, you can reduce the chances of leaks and stains.





How will I know what is the best menstrual product for me?

Try out different products to see which one works for you. When choosing, you should consider price, comfort, your menstrual flow, and how often you will need to change it while at work. Remember, leaks happen if your product isn't absorbent, doesn't stay in place, or if you wear it for too long.





I am constantly worried when I know my period is about to start.

It is always good to be prepared for your period before it starts by carrying or keeping extra menstrual products and a change of clothes at work. Even though menstruation can be stressful for some women at work, it can also be manageable and empowering if they feel like they have enough resources and support.





II. IMPORTANCE OF DIGNIFIED MENSTRUAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

III. FAMILY PLANNING AND MENSTRUATION

It can negatively affect employees when menstrual health and hygiene are not properly addressed in the workplace:



1. Health

Employees who don't have access to safe and hygienic menstrual products may wear the product they have for longer than the recommended time, or they may use unsafe materials, which can lead to discomfort and infections. This can distract them, slow them down at work, or force them to take time off to see a doctor.



2. Productivity

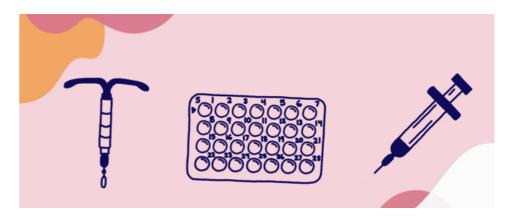
Employees may not be able to work effectively or meet targets if they are feeling menstrual pain, are not allowed to take toilet breaks, or are using uncomfortable menstrual products.

Menstruation can impact employees emotionally and physically; many workplaces often don't think about how menstruation can affect one's ability to be productive at work.

3. General Wellbeing

Menstruating employees may feel constantly worried or anxious because:

- They may accidentally stain their work clothes and be judged.
- They feel their supervisors won't understand why they may need to take time off or rest while menstruating.
- They don't have enough breaks to change their menstrual products in a timely manner, which may lead to leaking or infections.



Some women in the workplace use or are considering using a family planning method (also known as contraception or birth control). Certain types of family planning methods can affect a woman's menstrual cycle, especially hormonal contraceptives like the Depo Provera shot.

Some people who start, stop, or change family planning methods may experience:

- Heavier or lighter bleeding
- Bleeding outside their regular menstrual cycle
- Shorter or longer menstrual cycles
- Multiple menstrual cycles in one month
- Absence of bleeding

If employees are experiencing uncomfortable physical or emotional symptoms as a result of using a family planning method, they should consult their doctor.

Encourage employees to seek medical advice from a doctor before starting any family planning method.

NOTE:





PART 3: ADDRESSING MENSTRUAL STIGMA IN THE WORKPLACE



What is period shame?

This is when women feel or are made to feel embarrassed because they menstruate. No one should feel or be made to feel ashamed because of a natural process.

What is a myth?

A belief that many people have that isn't true.

What is a taboo?

Something that is not acceptable to say, do, or believe in, usually because of social, religious, or cultural practices.

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Myth:

Women must bear and suffer their menstruation in silence - especially in the workplace!

Fact:

Menstruation is a natural process which can be kept private, but if employees want to talk about their menstrual experiences and needs, they should be able to do so freely. It is everyone's responsibility to create a culture of acceptance, respect, and kindness at work.



How can we reduce menstrual stigma and period shame?

Many myths, taboos, and misinformation about menstruation in society also exist in the workplace. To address menstrual stigma and period shame, we must replace misinformation with accurate information.

Myth:

Menstruation is something women should just persevere through!

Fact:

A woman should not have to suffer while menstruating. Everyone in the workplace can help women have more manageable menstrual experiences at work.



Myth: Menstruation is dirty and shameful!

Fact:

Menstruation is a natural process that helps prepare the body for potential pregnancy.

Myth:

Leaking or staining work clothes with menstrual blood is shameful!

Fact:

Menstrual blood can leak and stain work clothes for many reasons. The first aider shouldn't make employees feel guilty, afraid, or ashamed when this happens. Instead, they can help women find fresh clothes or menstrual products.

Mvth:

Discussing menstruation in the workplace is attention-seeking, shameful, and immature!

Fact:

Employees who talk about their experiences with menstruation aren't immature or attention-seeking. Menstruation can affect their workplace experiences in many ways, and the first aider should listen to employees respectfully when they speak out about menstruation-related issues. They shouldn't judge women for needing menstrual products or accidentally staining their work clothes, nor should they discuss or gossip about employees' menstrual experiences with other people.

Myth:

Menstruation is a burden that women need to bear privately!

Fact:

Menstruation isn't something women have to experience alone or in silence, especially if it means that they're in excessive pain at work. Just as we support other employees who are pregnant, have injuries, or have health-related needs, we can also find ways to support employees who menstruate so that they don't feel pressured to suffer quietly. Menstruating employees can be supported in the workplace through the provision of pain medication, breaks, and time to rest when in excessive pain.





PART 4: FIRST AIDER'S ROLE IN IMPROVING MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT (MHM) IN THE WORKPLACE



I. HOW FIRST AIDERS CAN IMPROVE MHM IN THE WORKPLACE

A first aider's role is to help employees when they need first aid.

This can include employees who menstruate and need support with managing pain, discomfort, or other issues related to their menstrual health and hygiene.

While supporting employees who menstruate, it is important that the first aider:



Protect confidentiality

- Don't discuss or gossip about employees when they share menstruation-related information with you.
- Advise employees to not gossip about someone else's period in the workplace.

Be non-judgmental

- Respect women's experiences with menstruation and listen to their concerns.
- Don't shame or judge employees for their choice of menstrual products.
- Don't dismiss menstruating employees who come to you for first aid advice.



Always be informed

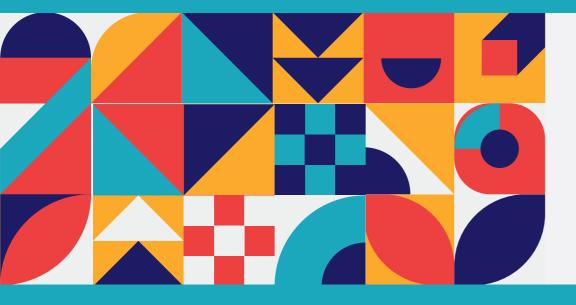
- Provide accurate information by increasing your knowledge about menstruation.
- Listen to what the employee needs and offer the best solution to her, even if it doesn't match your personal beliefs or preferences.
- Refer employees to an outside healthcare provider should they need additional care.
 For example, if an employee seems to be experiencing a menstrual disorder or a family planning-related menstrual complication, she should be referred to a doctor.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In the event that an employee needs additional information related to sexual, reproductive, and menstrual health, encourage her to reach out to the following resources:

- Aunty Jane Hotline Call for free at 0800 721 530
- Ask NIVI WhatsApp at +254 207 640 156
- LVCT Call for free from a Safaricom line at 1190
- Marie Stopes Kenya Call for free at 0800 720 005 or WhatsApp at +254 709 819 001





PART 5: PAIN MANAGEMENT



I. HOW TO MANAGE PAIN DURING MENSTRUATION



I think I need help. Day two of my menstrual cycle is usually so painful. I get the worst cramps and I have a hard time completing my work duties. How many painkillers should I take per day?

I'm sorry to hear that. It's okay to take non-prescription painkillers for relief. You can take 1- 2 tablets with water up to four times daily, as recommended on the packaging.





Everyone tells me that I should just bear this pain silently, but it's hard to do that, especially when I'm working. At what point should I take a painkiller?

There's no need to suffer unnecessarily! It's common to experience cramping before or during your period. You can take a painkiller if menstrual pain is preventing you from doing your work like you normally would. There are non-medicinal pain relief methods too.





Wait a minute...you mean there are other ways I we can relieve the pain from my cramps?

Yes! You can take warm baths, massage pain relief balms like Robb or Kaluma on your abdominal area, or you can apply heat where you feel pain by using a hot water bottle.



I didn't know that there are things I could do to ease the pain. I just thought that the pain I feel is part of life!

Some physical activities like stretching, taking walks or exercising can also help.





What options are there for people like me who will do anything to avoid any physical exercises?!

When dealing with women who are experiencing menstrual pain, first aiders can assess the situation and recommend any of the following methods:

II. ASSISTING EMPLOYEES WITH MENSTRUAL PAIN MANAGEMENT

Don't worry! Paying attention to what you eat while you menstruate is another helpful way to alleviate period cramps. Avoid caffeine and any foods that cause bloating and nausea. Instead, eat light, healthy meals, and drink plenty of water.





1. Common painkillers

Common painkillers, like paracetamol, can be bought at pharmacies or at local shops. It is advisable that employees get a doctor's opinion, however, if the common painkillers don't feel like they're helping.



Wah! These methods are simple for us to try.



2. Heat

Employees can buy a hot water bottle at the supermarket to apply heat to the abdomen and lower back. They can also improvise at home by using a plastic bottle filled with hot water. In either case, the bottle should be covered and wrapped using a thick fabric (like a towel) to prevent any burn accidents.

Start gradually with one method and observe which one works for you.





3. Pain relief balm massages

By applying and massaging a pain relief balm (like Robb or Kaluma), employees can relieve lower abdominal cramps, lower back pain, and headaches.





PART 6: MAINTAINING MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE IN THE WORKPLACE



I. MAINTAINING MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE IN THE WORKPLACE

Poor menstrual hygiene doesn't always mean someone is unhygienic. It can instead be linked to:



Why does having proper menstrual hygiene matter for women?

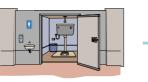


It's extremely important to maintain proper hygiene while menstruating. Poor menstrual hygiene could lead to negative health outcomes that can cause a woman to experience, among other things, vaginal discomfort, foul odor, chafing, or itchiness.

> What are some of the things women can do to maintain basic menstrual hygiene at work?

There are a number of things they can do, including using clean menstrual products to absorb and collect blood, and changing their menstrual products as often as required and/or recommended. Also, when using the toilet facility they should wash their hands with soap and water and wipe from front (vagina) to back (anus), as the opposite can cause infections.





Inadequate infrastructure like properly-managed toilet facilities with clean running water and a regular supply of soap.



Not practicing proper and regular hand washing.

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Lack of access to safe menstrual products.



TIPS

Wearing menstrual products for too long.

FOR GENERAL PERSONAL HYGIENE

First Aiders can suggest that employees:

- Avoid using cut pieces of cloth, especially if used as menstrual products or in place of toilet paper.
- Shower or bathe regularly with clean water.
- Avoid washing inside the vagina with soap or applying any scented products to this area; the vagina is a self-cleaning organ, and soap or other chemicals can throw off its natural chemical balance and increase the risk of getting an infection.
- Wear clean and dry underwear. Damp underwear can increase the risk of getting an infection.



II. REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CONDITIONS AFFECTING MENSTRUAL HEALTH

III. HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH POOR MENSTRUAL HYGIENE

Some health risks associated with poor menstrual hygiene:

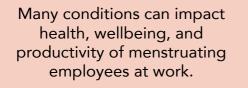
Bacterial Vaginosis (BV): This is an imbalance of certain types of bacteria that become present in larger amounts than usual in the vagina exposing one to infection, including sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Symptoms of BV include itching, odor, and abnormal vaginal discharge.

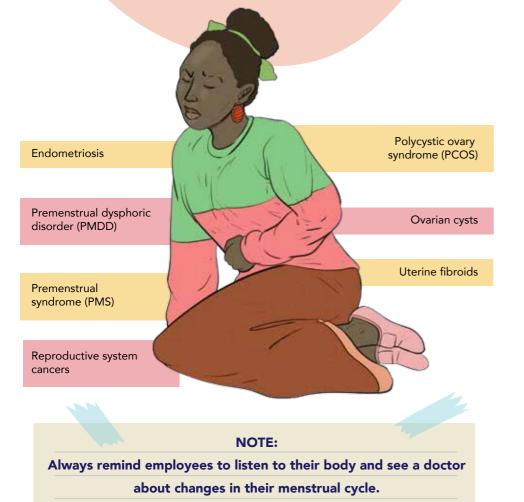
Urinary Tract Infection (UTI): This is an infection that affects the bladder, kidneys or urethra. Most UTIs are caused by bacteria and can cause symptoms such as pain in the genital area and lower abdomen, excessive itching, rashes, blood, irregularly colored discharge, and/or vaginal odor.

Reproductive Tract Infection (RTI):

This is an infection that affects any part of the reproductive system. Examples are bacterial vaginosis, yeast infections, and STIs, among others.

Toxic shock syndrome (TSS): A rare but serious bacterial infection that gets into the blood and produces harmful toxins. It is often associated with leaving menstrual products, like tampons and menstrual cups, in for too long before being replaced. Poor personal hygiene practices around the vaginal opening may also contribute to bacterial growth. Symptoms of toxic shock syndrome often appear suddenly and can include fever, low blood pressure, headache, muscle aches, confusion, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, rash, and seizures.







PART 7: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE MITIGATION AND SUPPORT IN THE WORKPLACE



I. GENDER BASED VIOLENCE SUPPORT IN THE WORKPLACE

As a first aider, you may receive questions or concerns that employees have about gender-based violence (GBV). You can be someone reliable at work who cares about employees' wellbeing and creates a safe environment for them. They should feel as though they can reach out when they need help.

What is GBV?

GBV is when violence is directed against a person because of their gender.



TYPES OF VIOLENCE



Physical - The use of physical force that may result in bodily injury, physical pain, or impairment. Some examples include pinching, kicking, slapping, strangling, burning, among others.



Sexual - Any unwanted sexual act (touching), unwanted sexual behavior (kissing) or unwanted sexual comments ('you look sexy today') without another person's permission that makes them feel sad, upset or scared. These include rape, sexual assault, or sexual harassment.



Psychological - Intentional harm that affects another person's mental or emotional state of mind by using threats or verbal insults.

II. QUALITIES OF A SUPPORTIVE FIRST AIDER

A good listener

Listening can be more powerful than speaking. The first aider is a trusted person in the workplace who is respectful and listens with care.

Trustworthy

Protecting employees' confidentiality is the professional thing to do. It also assures employees that their safety is important.

Compassionate

Not shaming or blaming employees for experiencing any form of abuse validates their feelings and experiences.

Non-judgemental

Treating employees without judgement builds trust and shows empathy.

Some thoughtful things to say to employees experiencing GBV:

- I'm sorry; this must be very difficult for you.
- It's not your fault; you don't deserve this.
- You did nothing wrong.
- I'm here for you.
- I believe you.





NOTE:

NOTES

- If the employee has injuries or other health issues as a result of gender-based violence, connect them to urgent healthcare services.
- Provide employees with referrals for support they need (e.g., medical, psychosocial, legal, economic).
- Avoid offering solutions.

III. GBV SUPPORT CONTACTS

The following are some useful resources you can share discretely with employees who experience GBV and who may request additional support services:

- The Gender Violence Recovery Centre (GVRC) 0719 638 006 - Free medical emergency/ urgent healthcare services, follow-up
- care and therapy. • Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW) - Free SMS
- Hotline 20351, Hotline 0723 703 939 Emergency, medical, reporting, counseling and legal services.
- USIKIMYE 0718 158 400 Safe houses, legal aid, general services for survivors.
- Aunty Jane 0800 721 530 Information about sexual and reproductive health services.