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Little book of menstruation, menstrual health and menopause



By Royal Charter



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“When employers partner with their people to create diverse, equitable and inclusive workplaces in which women are supported to remain in their roles, this can bring enormous benefit, from productivity gains to enabling innovation.”

Anne Hayes, Director of Sectors, 2023
(Lifting The Second Glass Ceiling report)

Author



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Alice Smellie is the co-author of *Cracking The Menopause* with Mariella Frostrup and a co-founder and director of Menopause Mandate, a campaign group that launched in 2022 and is working for improvements in menopause support and education.

As a journalist, she has written for many major UK publications, including *The Daily Mail*, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *Marie Claire*.



Introduction

Cultural taboos, a lack of representation and systemic gender bias mean that even just a decade ago, this little book, covering menstruation, menstrual health and menopause in the workplace would have been inconceivable.

Perhaps you are still wondering why the subject is so important for your company today?

Although the UK workforce has changed, its fundamental structure hasn't yet caught up. Almost 16 million women aged 16 and over are in employment, constituting almost half the workforce.

And yet, women, trans men and non-binary people have had to fit themselves into a space that wasn't designed to accommodate half the population, and their biology isn't currently being sufficiently considered.

There's no question that, to achieve equity in the workforce over the next few decades,

all businesses, organizations, charities and workplaces need to provide adequate support for employees who experience menstruation, menstrual health and menopause.

The little book of menstruation, menstrual health and menopause aims to provide a straightforward introduction to the subject, to help organizations start the conversation and implement straightforward changes that can create a more inclusive, more productive and more contented workplace for all employees, regardless of gender.



What are menstruation and menstrual health?

Historically, menstruation and menstrual health have too frequently been ignored or treated as taboo topics.

The menstrual cycle is around 28 days and common symptoms include blood loss, menstrual cramps, mood changes, breast pain and digestive changes. These don't usually have a big impact on work, but underlying menstrual health conditions can cause extra challenges for employees; around 10% of women are affected by endometriosis, one in three by fibroids and around one in ten by Polycystic Ovary Syndrome. In addition, 5–8% have PMDD.

Not everyone who menstruates will need support, but it's important that organizations make adjustments available for those who want them.

A recent poll revealed that 85% of UK working women feel stress or anxiety managing their period at work, and 63% said that they feel uncomfortable talking about the subject, with one in ten saying this is partly because of unsupportive management.

The benefits of an inclusive workplace have also been evidenced time and time again. In 2022, 86% of respondents to a poll said they'd be more likely to work in a company if it provided support for 'menstrual health, menopause and pregnancy-related issues'.





What is menopause?

Menopause has also been shrouded by centuries of negative connotations and misinformation. This has made it very difficult for those experiencing symptoms to get adequate support from their employer.

Perimenopause is when the key hormones made by the ovaries - oestrogen and progesterone - fluctuate and fall. This usually occurs in the early to mid-forties and can cause a range of symptoms from anxiety, insomnia, low mood and brain fog to hot flushes, night sweats, aching joints and changes to periods. Most will have at least one symptom and over 25% describe severe symptoms.

Menopause occurs exactly a year after the last period, on average between the ages of 45 and 55. Early menopause is when periods stop before the age of 45, and one in 100 will experience premature menopause, before the age of 40. It can happen naturally, or as a side effect of some medical treatments.

Discussing and supporting menopause is important. Currently, one in ten working women experiencing menopause will leave their job. A 2022 UK Parliamentary survey highlighted that the attitude of other colleagues and line managers can have a significant impact in terms of an employee feeling able to seek support and even stay in their job.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, BSI's Lifting The Second Glass Ceiling Report (2023, UK Market Overview) revealed that 71% of women polled in the UK believe it is helpful for organizations to have formal policies to address personal health and wellbeing.

Why employers need to act

By supporting menstruation, menstrual health and menopause, you are directly benefiting your employees and your organizations.

Retaining experienced and valued employees is to the benefit of all; there can be huge financial costs in replacing staff. In fact, research suggests that menopause is costing the UK workplace £10 billion in women leaving the workplace.

What's more, you're increasing employee engagement and productivity, enhancing their health and wellbeing, and improving diversity and inclusion objectives. All employees will benefit from positive changes - not just those who menstruate.

There is undoubtedly a need for changes to be made; BSI's Lifting The Second Glass Ceiling Report (2023, UK Market Overview) also reports that only 4% of women say they are aware of formal policies in their organization.

Even with minimal resources, it's possible to create more awareness within your company, generate a positive workplace culture and make small, practical adjustments.



Six steps employers can take



01

Tackling the taboo

Normalize the subject, start the conversation and acknowledge the need for change. Don't underestimate how symptoms can affect confidence and sometimes ability.

02

Consider practical aspects of work

Availability of well-maintained toilet and shower facilities is vital. Provide gender-neutral toilets in addition to separate men's and women's facilities, as well as access to and easy disposal of menstrual products.

Temperature and ventilation can be key to comfort. Allow windows to be opened if practical or offer localised fans, allow the use of tools such as heat packs and provide access to drinks and snacks.

03

Develop policy guidance and best practice

Think about how menstrual health and menopause might be integrated into any existing company policies, and consider whether recruitment, training or progression practices are inclusive of menstrual and peri/menopausal health.

To support organizations of all sizes and sectors in implementing inclusive best practices, we have published a pioneering toolkit - British Standard **BS 30416 Menstruation, menstrual health and menopause in the workplace - Guide.**





04

Foster a supportive workplace culture

Creating a healthy and inclusive workplace culture is a critical part of change. Evaluate whether there's openness and respect around the subjects of menstrual health and menopause.

Simple suggestions from the standard include designating a senior leader with responsibility for advocating menstrual health and peri/menopause support and introducing self-help resources such as an employee network. Ensure these resources are communicated clearly with employees.

Implement regular checks with employees to raise any issues or concerns they might have. Opening up the conversation might feel awkward, but there is a list of suggested questions and approaches in BS 30416 as well as recommended adjustments based on answers.

Menstrual and peri/menopausal health affects everyone, so any workplace initiatives should be available to all.

“BS 30416 offers great practical tools to help people navigate menstruation and peri/menopausal health in the workplace. It is an all-encompassing, handy tool providing everything needed for people in our organization to upskill themselves on the topic of menopausal health.”

Holly Pembridge, Head of Diversity and Inclusion and Recruitment, the Senedd Commission

05

Question how the work is designed

The shape of the working day can make a huge difference to those who menstruate.

Consult with employees as to their preferences. For example, should someone experience flooding or interrupted sleep because of night sweats, flexible working might be hugely supportive and also reduce absenteeism.

Generally, changes to working hours or home-working could mean huge boosts to wellbeing as could flexi-leave, flexible start and finish times.

Think about whether certain tasks are always suitable, such as front-facing hours or heavy lifting, and provide ways to take time out during the day, such as splitting lunch breaks.

06

Inclusivity in menstruation, menstrual health and menopause at work

Every experience of menstrual and menopausal health is different. Factors that might impact this include ethnicity, age, gender, disability and neurodiversity. All organizations should be aware of these.

Disabled employees or those with underlying medical conditions might have additional complications related to menstruation, menstrual health and menopause, and those who are neurodivergent might find that challenges are exacerbated.

Trans men, non-binary and gender non-conforming people can menstruate, have menstrual health conditions and experience menopause. Consider whether risk assessments and policies are gender sensitive and use inclusive language.



Getting sector-specific

Depending on the working environment, there will be different considerations for employers to make their organization more inclusive.

If uniforms are worn, think about ensuring they're comfortable and made from breathable fabric. Size requirements may fluctuate, so have options available.

In roles without easy access to facilities, allow sufficient breaks and privacy during long shifts.

In roles where people are sitting for much of the day, consider offering flexibility when it comes to breaks, and the ability to adjust immediate surroundings such as light and temperature.

It might also be useful to provide employees with the flexibility to take additional breaks and privacy in highly physical or mobile roles.





What is BS 30416?

The little book of menstruation, menstrual health and menopause offers a concise overview, but far more detail is available in the revolutionary new standard, BS 30416 Menstruation, menstrual health and menopause in the workplace – Guide. This is a free and practical toolkit aiming to provide all organizations with guidance on how to adequately support employees who menstruate and experience peri/menopause.

The standard tackles the myths and taboos around the subjects and suggests straightforward actions and adjustments that sit alongside existing wellbeing initiatives. The emphasis is on education, awareness and an individual approach that recognizes the diversity of experience, facilitates fair treatments and opportunities for employees, and ultimately empowers them through every life stage.

Developed by experts in the field, there are many examples of actions and adjustments as well as checklists and tools.

To support organizations in applying the standard, BSI ran the free webinar ‘Getting started with menstrual health and menopause support in the workplace’. Attendees gained a deeper insight into the standard, heard from organizations already implementing menstrual health or menopause support and left with new ideas and practical tips that could inspire positive change. [Register here](#) to watch the webinar on-demand.

Case Study



As an organization, the Senedd Commission, which provides the property, staff and resources to support the Welsh Parliament, wanted to attract and retain the most talented and skilled employees. As a result of the raised awareness and expectation about wellbeing at work, the Senedd Commission recognized the need to address menstruation, menstrual health and peri/menopause to be considered as an employer of choice.

Auditing its policy

In response, the Senedd Commission became the first organization in Wales to adopt BS 30416:2023 Menstruation, menstrual health and menopause in the workplace – Guide.

The organization’s first step was to compare its existing policy to the standard. This identified areas where it was already meeting the recommendations, such as its staff and security uniforms using natural fibres to provide comfort, in addition to areas that needed improvement.

For these areas, the Senedd Commission used the standard to make quick changes to its policy to support its employees.

These included:

- Revising its existing policy to reflect current terminology; highlighting its legal duty; providing information on menstrual and peri/menopausal health cycles; and providing practical advice. The policy evolved into more than just an instruction of what to do, it became a handy self-help tool for people.
- Upgrading its hot desk booking system so staff could manage their symptoms better by booking desks based on their proximity to air conditioning vents, open windows, radiators, kitchens or toilets etc.
- Updating its Intranet to make it easier for people to find the types of support available.
- Its gender and mental health networks held a joint menstrual and peri/ menopausal health event around World Menopause Day.
- Launching its new toolkit on the 18 October 2023, to mark World Menopause Day.

A long-term roadmap

In addition to these quick actions, the Senedd Commission is using the practical tools offered by the standard to identify and develop long-term changes. This currently includes reviewing its procurement requirements to ensure menstrual and peri/menopausal health training provision is inclusive of a diverse range of people and implementing inclusion/workplace adjustment passports.

BS 30416:2023’s impact

By accessing an established framework for updating its policy, the Senedd Commission could easily explain the requirements for change to its organization’s leaders. The topic of menstruation, menstrual health, and menopause was instantly brought into focus and critical conversations could be facilitated across the workplace.

The Senedd Commission is now more confident in its organizational provision, has the support to make improvements where required and can upskill, empower, support and attract employees moving forward.

“The standard is great because it’s a full and comprehensive document, outlining the most up-to-date and current thinking around menstrual health. It has been produced in consultation with a diverse range of people, providing us instantly with a wealth of information that would have taken us ages to replicate on the same scale.”

Abi Lasebikan, Diversity and Inclusion Officer, the Senedd Commission

The next steps for organizations

1. Download BS 30416 and share it with stakeholders.
2. Hold internal focus groups with employees to understand their needs.
3. Use the sample checklists in BS 30146 to help with assessments and identifying quick wins and areas that need improvement.
4. Create a communication plan to track activities, who is responsible and expected outcomes and timescales.
5. Provide HR with training, then extend to line managers, employees and menstrual and menopausal health advocates.



A quick recap

- Almost fifty per cent of the workforce experiences menstruation to menopause, and it's important to understand and support their needs.
- Opening the conversation is the first step - creating awareness and encouraging education and communication.
- Making adjustments will benefit all employees and your organization.
- Look at your existing policies and working environment and make small changes to improve comfort and practicalities.
- Be aware that ethnicity, age, gender, disability or neurodiversity can affect experiences.



Why BSI

Established in 1901, BSI is the UK's National Standards Body. We have over a century of experience and work with organizations of every size, across all industry sectors. We understand small businesses and the issues they face.

Our role is to help organizations improve the quality and safety of processes, products, services and systems through voluntary, consensus-driven standards. A standard is an agreed way of doing something, a collective framework that is created by experts, and consolidated by BSI. Subjects range from occupational health to net zero, and we have a global community of 12,500 experts representing industry and consumers, organizations and governments.

We are constantly striving to support organizations in offering equal opportunities in their workplaces, and standards are powerful tools for achieving this. Your organization can become more successful and your employees' everyday lives easier, safer and healthier.

For BSI, social responsibility and sustainable, fair employment are increasingly essential to an organization's success. With the current economic climate testing organizational resilience to its limit, it is clear that your workforce is a vital asset. Supporting them must be a priority.

Take the next step in creating a more inclusive workplace by downloading the standard.

Scan the QR code for additional resources on the topic.



Suggested resources

[Patient arm of the British Menopause Society](#)

[Premature menopause](#)

[PMDD](#)

[Endometriosis](#)

[For support and advice](#)

[Further advice for line managers](#)



Discover more about BS 30416
on our [website](#)