

TOTM

**Being a
Supportive
Manager.**



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Why Managers Matter: The Manager's Role in Menstrual Health at Work

Managers play a critical role in shaping how safe employees feel to speak up about their health needs. Even the best-written policy will fail if managers are unsure, uncomfortable, or inconsistent in how they respond.



Your role is not to diagnose, fix, or manage medical conditions. Your role is to:

- Create psychological safety
- Respond with empathy and professionalism
- Enable reasonable, agreed workplace adjustments
- Have regular check-ins to understand how your team is coping
- Signpost employees to the right support

Why This Matters for Teams and Performance...

Poorly supported menstrual health can lead to:

- Presenteeism (employees working while unwell)
- Reduced concentration and productivity
- Increased absence or burnout
- Loss of trust in managers and the organisation (leading to employees looking for new work)

Supportive management leads to:

- ✓ Higher engagement and retention of talent
- ✓ Sustainable performance
- ✓ Stronger team trust and morale

Understanding Menstrual Health at Work: What Menstrual Health Can Look Like in the Workplace

Menstrual health affects people differently. Some employees may experience little impact, while others may face symptoms that significantly affect their ability to work.

Common symptoms that may impact work include:

- Pain or cramps
- Fatigue or exhaustion
- Migraines or headaches
- Nausea
- Difficulty concentrating or brain fog
- Heightened anxiety or low mood

Symptoms can fluctuate month to month. Avoid assumptions about how someone “should” feel or function.

Inclusive Understanding

- Not all women menstruate.
- Not everyone who menstruates identifies as a woman.
- Some employees may not feel comfortable using medical language or haven't yet had a diagnosis for a specific menstrual health condition.
- Usually asking the employee how they'd like to be addressed, can support inclusive language being a barrier.

Use inclusive, respectful language and follow the employee's lead.



How to Have Supportive Conversations: When to Start a Conversation

You may notice:

- A change in performance or behaviour – performance related or behavioural such as quiet, nervous, anxious, removed, distracted, uncomfortable.
- Increased absence or lateness
- An employee disclosing menstrual-related difficulties
- It may show up within a regular 1:1 review

If you are concerned, it is appropriate to check in – but keep the focus on work impact, not medical details.

01

How to Start the Conversation

Use open, non-invasive language.

- “I wanted to check in and see how you’re doing.”
- “I’ve noticed you seem uncomfortable at times – is there anything at work we can adjust to better support you?”
- “If there’s anything affecting your work that you’d like to talk about, I’m here.”
- “I might not have all the answers, but I’d like to try support you.”

02

What to Avoid

- Asking for medical details or diagnoses
- Minimising symptoms (“everyone gets periods”)
- Making jokes or casual comments
- Sharing the conversation with others when it isn't necessary (depending on what the outcome of the conversation is, a direct line manager or HR might need to be aware of reasonable adjustments put in place).

03

Listening Well

- Let the employee speak (80/20 rule – 80% listening, 20% talking)
- Acknowledge what you hear (ask questions and clarify what you heard, relay the message back to the employee, ask them follow on questions to gain a deeper understanding)
- Thank them for sharing – and that while you might not have all the answers or be an expert in this subject you're pleased, you're now able to be able to support better.
- Avoid rushing to solutions, sometimes there won't be an immediate solution and that's fine, collaborate with the employee what the next steps or outcome will be.

What Support Looks Like in Practice: Common Workplace Adjustments

Support will vary depending on role and individual needs.

Examples include:

- Flexible start/finish times
- Temporary remote or hybrid working
- Adjusted workloads or deadlines
- More frequent breaks
- Quiet or rest spaces where available
- Uniform adaptations if uniform is required
- Access to cool spaces

Adjustments should be:

- Agreed, not imposed
- Proportionate and reasonable
- Reviewed regularly

Consistency and Fairness

Support does not mean treating everyone the same – it means responding fairly to individual needs. Document agreed adjustments and involved HR where needed to ensure consistency.

Your organisation might have their own process outlined as part of your policy, ensure to follow this process as these are put in place to support you, the organisation and the employee and align with acts such as the Equality Act 2010.



Expectations and Confidentiality

You are not expected to:

- Diagnose or medically assess
- Track menstrual cycles
- Approve adjustments outside of a policy, however you could consult with HR on a wider conversation to see if it is deemed fair and appropriate based on the individual needs.
- Act without HR guidance when unsure.

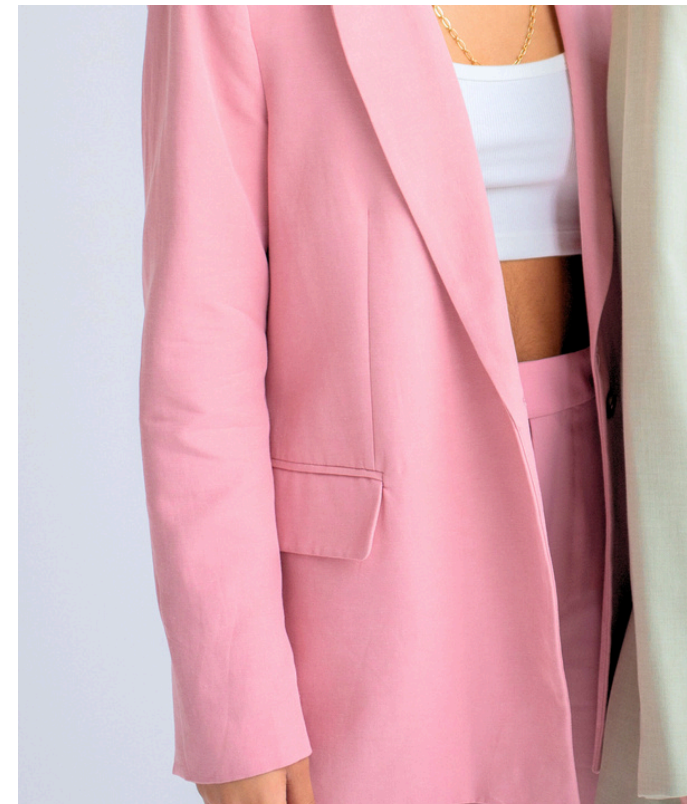
Confidentiality

Menstrual health information is sensitive personal data.

- Keep conversations private*
- Do not record unnecessary details
- Share information only with HR, and only when appropriate (refer to company processes to understand when it's appropriate).

**As a manager, confidentiality is the default – but there are important situations where you should not (or legally cannot) keep conversations private. These generally fall into legal, safety, ethical, and organisational duty categories.*

Follow your company processes and policies but some of these to consider would be:



- Allegations of harassment and discrimination
- Threats of violence towards self or others
- Serious mental health crises affecting safety
- Substance abuse issues that pose workplace risk

When to Involve HR:

Escalate to HR if:

- Any of the above
- Adjustments are ongoing or complex
- There is a performance or attendance concern
- You are unsure what support is appropriate
- The employee requests formal support

Conversation Checklist

Before the conversation:

- ✓ Am I focused on support, not assumptions?
- ✓ Do I understand the relevant policy?

During the conversation:

- ✓ Listen more than you speak
- ✓ Keep questions open and respectful
- ✓ Avoid medical detail

After the conversation:

- ✓ Agree next steps
- ✓ Check in again at an appropriate time
- ✓ Escalate to HR if needed

Red Flags to Watch For:

- Fear of taking time or flexibility
- Employees working through visible pain
- Jokes or dismissive comments in the team
- Unequal treatment between employees



Key Takeaways

You don't need to have all the answers.

Being a supportive manager starts with empathy, trust, and knowing when to involve HR.

Supportive conversations build stronger teams and healthier, more sustainable performance leading to higher productivity and retaining top female employees.

Keep this handbook close, so you can proactively support within your role!

Feel free to visit **totm.com** or search **@totmorganic** on socials to get in touch.

