



IMPROVING MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE:

A Guide for Senior Management & Leadership





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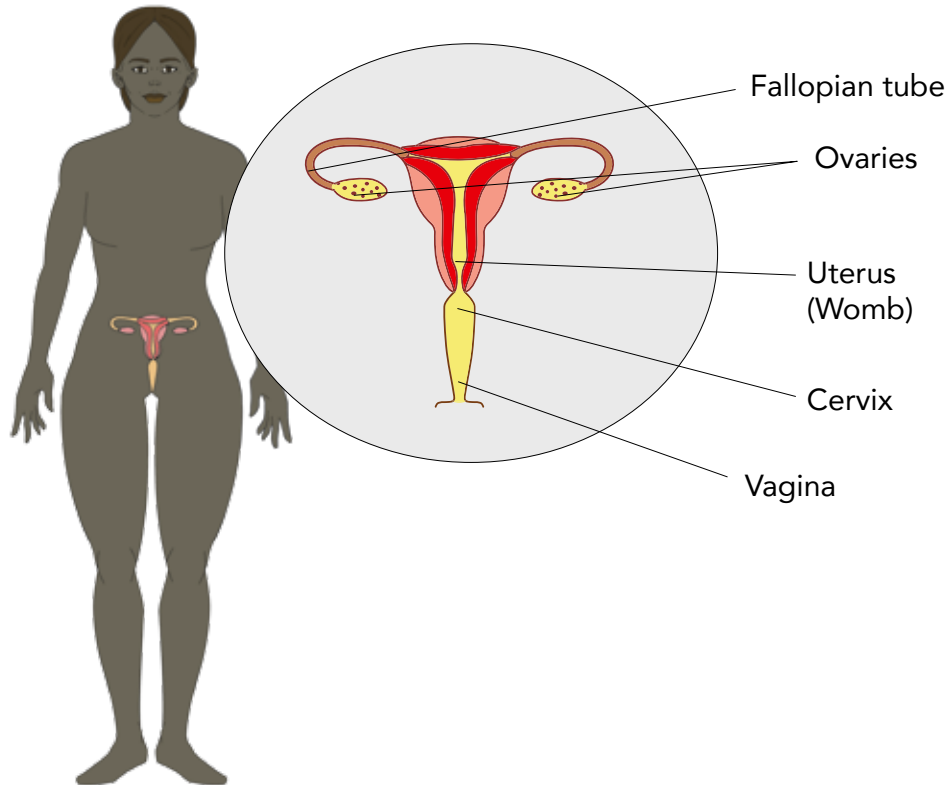


**PART 1:
MENSTRUATION**

1

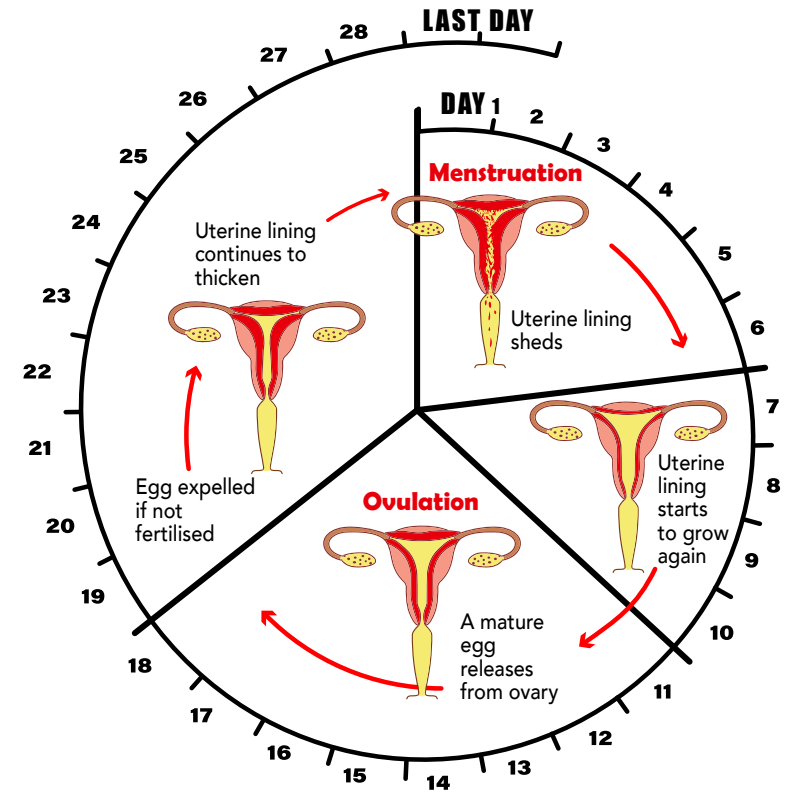
I. WHAT IS MENSTRUATION?

Menstruation is a **biological process** that happens from puberty to menopause to most **people who have a uterus**.



It is a natural process that happens every month, when blood and tissue flow out of the vagina. This process is also referred to as the time when a woman gets her "period."

The Menstrual Cycle



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.

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.



II. MENSTRUATING EMPLOYEES' NEEDS IN THE WORKPLACE

MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS

When employees don't have access to safe and hygienic menstrual products at work, finding ways to manage menstrual blood (like going home for a pad or running to a shop) can disrupt their duties. Menstrual products, like the following, effectively absorb or catch blood while a woman is menstruating:

DISPOSABLE PAD



- Pads made of absorbent material that are worn in a person's underwear to soak up menstrual flow.
- Available in different sizes and thicknesses. Must be changed every 4-6 hours, depending on menstrual flow, to avoid leaks, infections, and bad odor.
- Users must wash hands with soap and water before placing, changing, or removing the pad.
- **Lifespan:** Single use only.



HOW TO DISPOSE



Do not flush in the toilet



Wrap in paper*

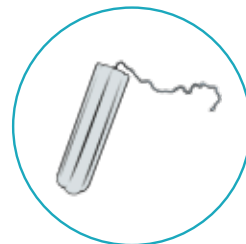


Put in the bin



Close bin

TAMPON



➤ Tightly rolled cylinder of cotton that is inserted into the vagina to absorb menstrual blood.

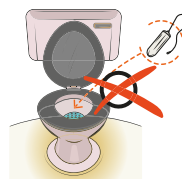
➤ Must be changed every 4-6 hours, depending on menstrual flow, to avoid leaks, infections, and bad odor.



➤ Users must wash hands with soap and water before and after changing the tampon.

➤ **Lifespan:** Single use only.

HOW TO DISPOSE



Do not flush in the toilet



Wrap in paper*



Put in the bin

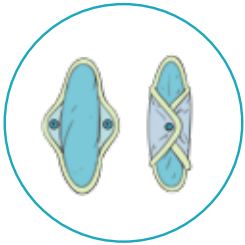


Close bin

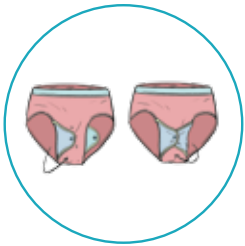
* One can wrap it with toilet paper, product packaging, or whatever material is convenient or available.



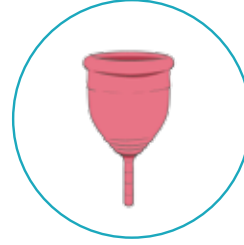
REUSABLE PAD



- Cloth pad made of absorbent material that is worn in a person's underwear to collect menstrual blood.
- Must be changed every 2-6 hours, depending on menstrual flow.
- Users must wash hands with soap and water before placing, changing or removing it.
- Can be soaked, washed, and dried to be used multiple times.
- **Lifespan:** Can last up to two years of use.



MENSTRUAL CUP



- Flexible device made of high-grade medical silicone.
- Inserted into the vagina to collect menstrual blood.
- User must wash hands with soap and water before placing, changing, or removing it.
- Can be worn for up to 12 hours and cleaned to use again.
- **Lifespan:** Can last up to 10 years.



HOW TO REUSE



Used pads can be folded inwards and placed in a leak proof bag



Soaked in clean water



Washed with clean water and soap



Dried completely in the sun or indoors

HOW TO REUSE

AT HOME



Sterilized by boiling in clean water before and after use



Clean cup stored in a clean bag

AT WORK



Removed from the vagina and emptied into a toilet



Washed with clean running water



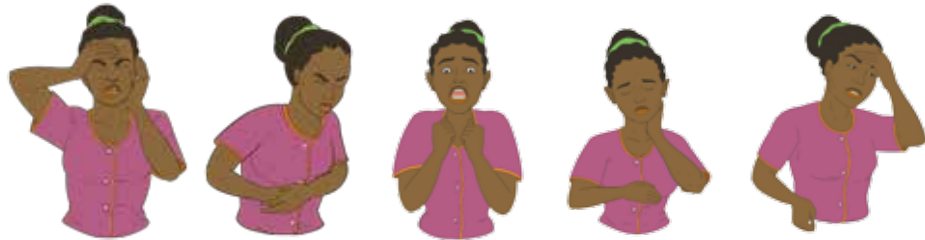
Reinserted into the vagina



If not reused, put the rinsed cup in a small clean bag to carry home



SYMPTOMS RELATED TO MENSTRUATION



Headache

Abdominal Pain

Anxiety

Depression

Lethargy

How does menstruation affect women?

Women go through many physiological changes related to their menstrual cycle that can make them anxious, nervous, tense, irritable, or even sad. These emotions can make them feel overwhelmed and can often affect their general wellbeing. While menstruating, women can also experience physical symptoms, such as stomach pain, bloating, lower back pain, headaches, nausea, etc.

How might menstruation affect women in the workplace?

The pain associated with menstruation can be difficult to endure at work. For some women, the pain can be debilitating and can affect productivity, performance, and attendance.

How can the workplace help employees manage their menstrual pain while they're at work?

Management can do a number of things to help menstruating employees manage their pain, such as: provide trained health support staff on site, like a nurse; ensure that employees have access to painkillers and other pain relief options at work; dedicate a space within the workplace where menstruating employees can rest or seek pain management help; allow for washroom breaks when needed; and promote open communication around managing menstrual pain at work.

III. MENSTRUATION ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE



Menstruation changes across a person's life course and reproductive years. Adolescent girls often experience more irregular periods during the early years of menstruation.



Periods become more regular and predictable after puberty. They occur approximately every month until menopause.



The length and frequency of a woman's menstrual cycle can vary due to different factors, such as those related to sleep, nutrition, pregnancy, contraceptive use, stress, and physical endurance.




Later in life, women may experience perimenopausal symptoms like hot flashes, lack of sleep, changes in fertility, and bladder problems, which could affect their productivity at work.



Towards the end of a woman's reproductive years (usually around the ages of 45 to 55), menstruation becomes irregular and unpredictable, eventually stopping altogether. This process is called menopause.





did you
KNOW

2 billion people around the world menstruate. Many of them also menstruate while at work.

Employees can **be private about their menstruation** if they want to.

Everyone can play a role in **normalizing** menstruation.

No employee should be silent about her experience with menstruation because of **embarrassment or fear**.

Stigma associated with menstruation is deeply rooted in **cultural taboos, social and religious beliefs, discrimination against women, and lack of information.**

It is not right for any employee to **target, demean,** or make others feel **uncomfortable** because they are menstruating.

Management can create a work environment where menstruating employees feel supported at work **instead of being shamed or teased.**

Talking about menstruation **doesn't** make someone an **attention-seeker, shameful, lazy, immature** or a **"bad"** employee.



IV. REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CONDITIONS AFFECTING MENSTRUAL HEALTH

Many conditions can impact health, wellbeing, and productivity of menstruating employees at work.

Endometriosis

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)

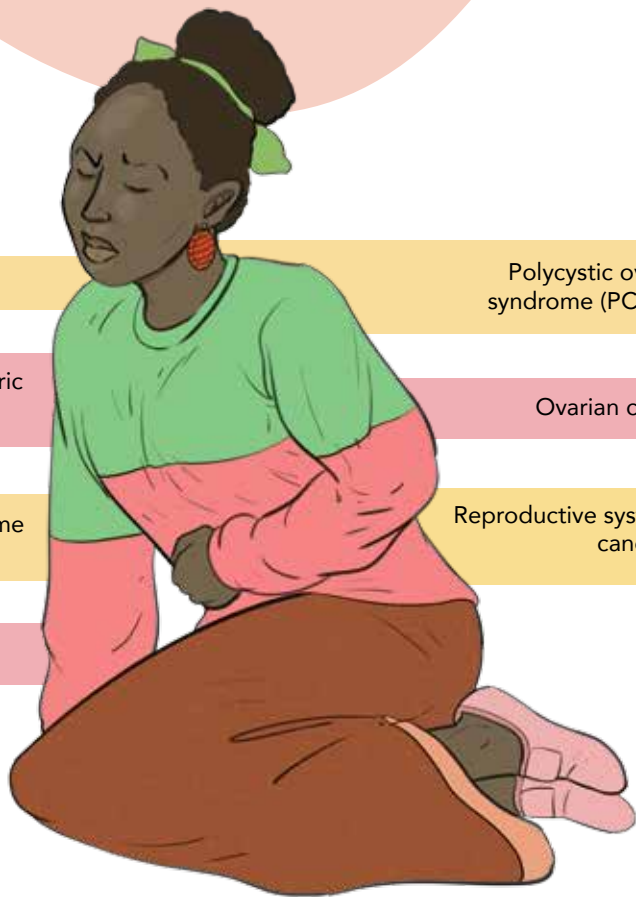
Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD)

Ovarian cysts

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS)

Reproductive system cancers

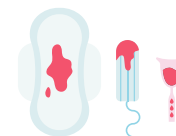
Uterine fibroids



Common symptoms experienced by menstruating employees include:



Severe abdominal pain



Changes to blood flow



Changes in energy, mood, and comfort

did you
KNOW

- ⚡ The menstrual cycle signals a lot about a woman's physical health.
- ⚡ Some contraceptives can have side effects that may change the menstrual flow, cause irregular bleeding, change frequency of menstrual cycles, and alter level of pain.

Encourage employees to see a doctor if any aspect of their menstrual cycle changes.





**PART 2:
IMPORTANCE OF MHM
IN THE WORKPLACE**

2

Anything that influences employees' productivity, performance, and ability to reach their full potential in the workplace affects the company's overall business outcomes.

Investing in women's menstrual health, hygiene, and wellbeing can create a supportive environment for all employees, which contributes to the company's success.



I. KENYA'S MHM POLICY

The Government of Kenya is committed to addressing menstrual health and hygiene as a national priority. In 2020, Kenya launched its first-ever policy aimed at improving MHM across the country. The policy recognizes that within the workplace:



did you
KNOW

Ahead of the curve: In 2011, Government of Kenya removed import duties and value-added sales tax on menstrual hygiene products and solutions.

II. NORMALIZING MENSTRUATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Is it appropriate for employees to talk about their menstrual experiences at work?

Yes, if they want to! Discussing menstruation at work is not unprofessional. Many employees feel pressured to silently tolerate menstruation-related issues because they are worried that others will shame them for talking about it. It is everyone's responsibility to create a culture of acceptance, respect, and kindness at work.

Is menstruation dirty?

No! Menstruation is a natural process that helps prepare the body for potential pregnancy. Menstrual blood is not dirty, unhygienic, or unclean.

Should management be involved with "women's issues" like menstruation?

Yes! Women play a valuable role in the workplace; ignoring their menstrual needs impacts their wellbeing, and therefore, the company's outcomes. Management can create a work environment that encourages women to share their menstrual experiences without being dismissed, shamed, or bullied. They can also address infrastructural needs so that employees can maintain their menstrual health and hygiene. For example, they can make sure the workplace has properly-managed toilet facilities with clean running water and adequate soap.

Do people have false beliefs or misconceptions about menstruation?

Yes! There are a lot of beliefs and misconceptions about menstruation that are deeply rooted in our culture and religion. Management can support efforts to educate all employees about MHM and stop the dissemination of misinformation.

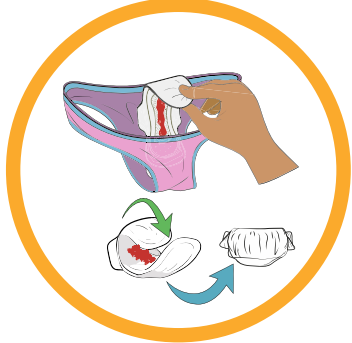


III. IMPACT OF INADEQUATE MHM ON EMPLOYEES

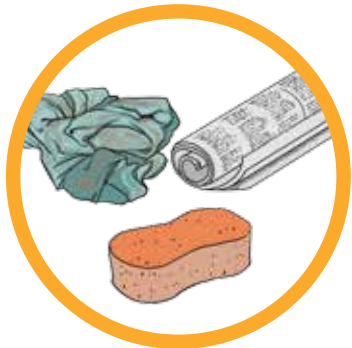
It's extremely important to maintain proper hygiene while menstruating. Poor menstrual hygiene can lead to negative health outcomes and doesn't always mean someone is unhygienic. It can instead be linked to:



Lack of adequate toilet facilities, clean running water, and soap at work.



Wearing menstrual products for too long.



Using unsafe menstrual materials when affordable products are not available at work.

IV. BASIC HYGIENE IN THE WORKPLACE

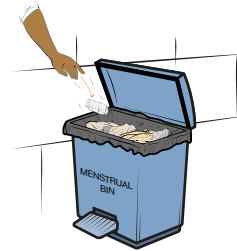
Workplaces can promote good menstrual hygiene by:



Ensuring that there are functional handwashing facilities with soap and water.



Guaranteeing that there are enough clean, functional, and accessible toilets.



Providing methods for employees to dispose used menstrual products safely.



Ensuring that toilet facilities are regularly equipped with toilet paper.



Supporting cleaning staff and promptly addressing maintenance issues.





**PART 3:
THE ROLE OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

3

I. CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD LEADER



Listens

...without judgement or bias and respects and protects employees' privacy.



Effectively Communicates

...helpful information to employees about support systems, resources, and targets so that employees are motivated and operations are more efficient.



Addresses employees' needs

...by removing barriers that impede employees' success and by understanding what influences employee behavior.



Demonstrates empathy

...by creating an environment where all employees feel empowered and supported to do their jobs.



Elevates Employees

...by motivating them to achieve their full potential and by seeking to understand and reduce workplace conflict.



Respects employees

...by leading with compassion and ensuring that employees know that they're valuable and that their wellbeing is important to the company's success.

II. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN MANAGERS AND EMPLOYEES

The workplace can thrive when managers respectfully communicate with employees about their menstrual needs. Doing so can:

- Encourage employees to speak honestly about menstruation-related challenges that may be impacting their productivity
- Inform how to improve the workplace so that it better supports menstruating employees
- Help address the needs of menstruating employees while also meeting business targets

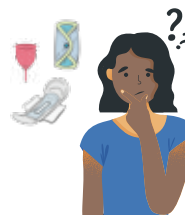
By supporting employees' menstrual health and hygiene in the workplace, senior management and leadership can build a more successful work environment.

III. CREATING AN MHM-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE

Women may experience discomfort, distraction, and distress when menstruating. To address these feelings and improve workplace productivity, senior management and leadership can create an MHM-friendly environment.



Discomfort: While menstruating, women may feel pain or discomfort, which can impact their energy level, emotional state, and/or ability to be productive. To ease their discomfort, an MHM-friendly workplace might allow for temporary adjustments to work duties when women are menstruating.



Distraction: Menstruating employees can be distracted at work if they lack necessary menstrual resources, such as access to safe menstrual products, clean toilet facilities, and breaks to manage their menstruation confidently and safely. This can affect their ability to meet targets on time. An MHM-friendly workplace supports productivity by ensuring the dignity of all menstruating employees.



Anxiety: Menstruating employees may feel distress because they're fearful of staining their clothes while at work and being judged for it. They may also worry that supervisors won't understand if they need to use the toilet more frequently, request lighter duties, take a break, or rest when menstruating. An MHM-friendly workplace fosters a culture of compassion and a safe space for menstruating employees.







IV. ADDRESSING MENSTRUAL STIGMA IN THE WORKPLACE: HARMFUL MYTHS AND HELPFUL FACTS



What is Menstrual Stigma?

Stigma associated with menstruation. This stigma is deeply rooted in cultural taboos, social and religious beliefs, sexism (discrimination against women), and lack of information, resulting in negative and unfair treatment of people who menstruate.

HARMFUL MYTHS	HELPFUL FACTS
Women must bear and suffer their menstruation in silence - especially in the workplace!	 <p>Women should not feel pressured to be silent or secretive due to fear of being shamed. Women can be private about their menstruation or discuss it openly – both are okay.</p>
Menstruation is something women should just persevere through!	 <p>Menstruation, especially menstrual pain or discomfort, is not something women should have to persevere through, as it can affect their productivity and performance at work.</p>
Discussing menstruation in the workplace is attention-seeking, shameful, and unprofessional!	 <p>Employees can talk about their menstrual experiences, just as they would about other aspects of their health or lives. It is not immature, shameful or unprofessional. Discussing menstruation openly and respectfully is acceptable in the workplace.</p>
Leaking or staining work clothes with menstrual blood is shameful!	 <p>When clothes are stained with menstrual blood one should not be made to feel at fault, distressed or embarrassed, particularly by colleagues or superiors.</p>

V. PROMOTING AN MHM-FRIENDLY CULTURE IN THE WORKPLACE

To create a positive workplace experience for menstruating employees, management should ensure that MHM-related concerns are handled like any other health issue and addressed with compassion and respect.

1. Pay attention to how inadequate MHM support can negatively affect employee productivity.

- Avoid workplace procedures that limit the number of times employees can access toilet facilities.
- Consider temporary adjustments to tasks or workload for employees experiencing menstrual pain and discomfort.

2. Prioritize an environment that acknowledges and discusses employees' menstrual needs in the workplace.

- Normalize the needs of menstruating employees as part of occupational health and safety.
- Train managers and supervisors to not discriminate against menstruating employees.
- Address MHM-related concerns that are raised by employees.

3. Identify ways to accommodate employees' needs and ensure that they can continue to be productive while menstruating.

- Do not tolerate acts of bullying or teasing related to menstruation.
- Advocate for and support employees when they feel pressure to meet production targets at the risk of their own health and wellbeing.

4. Model good leadership by listening to all employees, including those who menstruate, and address any barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential at work.

- Trust women's menstrual experiences when they raise a concern.
- Identify which menstruation-related concerns impact employees' productivity and find helpful solutions for business continuity.
- Avoid generalizing menstrual experiences.

5. Create a respectful and welcoming environment for employees to openly and comfortably discuss their menstrual needs if they want to.

- Do not penalize menstruating employees for experiencing a natural process.
- Do not hold menstruation-related adjustments to work duties or schedules against an employee during evaluations for supervisory roles.



VI. MHM-FRIENDLY MANAGEMENT: QUESTIONS TO ASK

When thinking about how to support MHM in the workplace, senior management and leadership can consider the following questions:



Numbers: What needs to be done to ensure targets are met and profits improved, while also empowering and supporting employees to do their jobs well?



Creating a supportive environment: How can management support women who are menstruating so that they are more comfortable and productive at work?



Inclusive workplaces: How can organizations foster a safe and inclusive work environment to ensure that business is a success?

MHM-friendly management ensures that:



Menstruating employees have awareness, information, and self-confidence regarding their menstrual hygiene.



Menstruating employees can access safe, hygienic, and absorbent materials or products and supplies, either on site or affordably near their workplace.



Menstruating employees can access safe and clean facilities that are equipped with water and soap to bathe oneself and clean or dispose of used menstrual products.



There is a supportive environment for menstruating employees to manage their period without fear of stigma or embarrassment.

VII. MENSTRUATING EMPLOYEES ARE VALUABLE

Menstruating employees are able to fulfill their tasks and are capable of holding any position at work.

Menstruating employees are valuable, hardworking, dedicated and productive.

Menstruating colleagues are not a liability to the workplace; they are important assets that contribute to the functioning of the workplace.

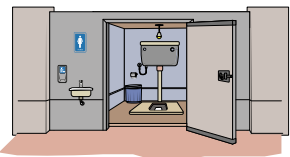
Someone's gender is not an indicator of whether they will be a good or bad employee.

Menstruating employees can still benefit organizations even when their workload or responsibilities are adjusted during menstruation.

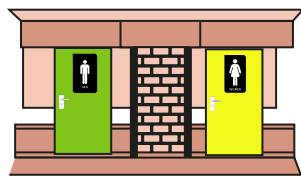


VIII. ADVOCATING FOR MHM-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE INFRASTRUCTURE

Management can ensure a healthy and safe menstrual experience in the workplace by promoting MHM-friendly infrastructure that includes:



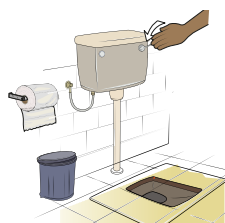
Toilet facilities that are clean and functioning at all times.



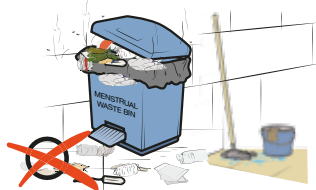
Privacy between men's and women's toilets.



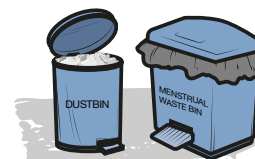
Toilets that have good lighting and doors with locks.



Toilet facilities that are regularly equipped with toilet paper.



Toilets that are cleaned regularly to avoid buildup of bad odors, trash, and dirt.



Menstrual bins that have lids for employees to dispose used menstrual products.



Menstrual waste bins that are emptied routinely to avoid overflow of waste.



Taps and sources of clean water that are functional with adequate pressure for washing.

Sinks that have a functioning drainage system.








Basins that are equipped with functional soap dispensers or clean bar soap.



Discrete supply of disposable and reusable pads that are available in an emergency for menstruating employees at work.



IX. DO'S AND DONT'S OF WORKPLACE MHM

<p>DON'T: Make offensive jokes and remarks on whether someone is menstruating.</p> 	<p>DO: Create a way for employees to anonymously report incidents of offensive jokes and ridicule so that they are addressed by management.</p>
<p>DON'T: Assume a menstruating employee who needs a break or adjustment to workload is making an excuse to avoid work.</p> 	<p>DO: See menstruation as a valid reason to seek temporary adjustments to work duties.</p>
<p>DON'T: Make comments implying that employees who menstruate are weak, attention-seeking, or unprofessional.</p> 	<p>DO: Train supervisors and employees to listen to women's menstrual experiences with respect and compassion.</p>
<p>DON'T: Mock or gossip about someone when menstrual blood stains their clothes.</p> 	<p>DO: If a menstruating colleague has a visible blood stain, let her know politely and privately.</p>
<p>DON'T: Ignore or stand in the way of women's menstrual needs in the workplace.</p> 	<p>DO: Support employees' access to safe and reliable menstrual products, menstrual education, pain management resources, and MHM-friendly infrastructure in the workplace.</p>

