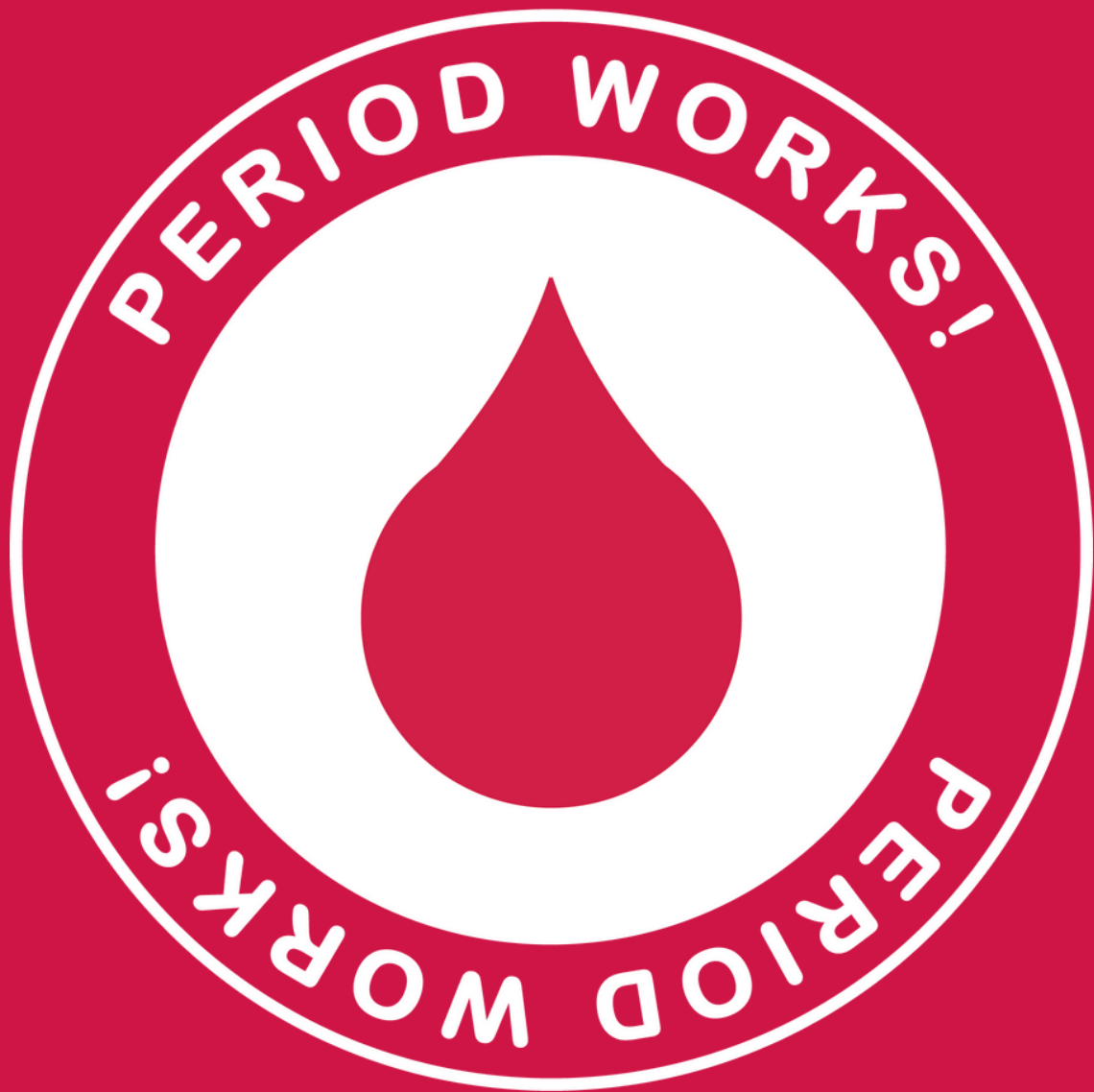





**HELLO  
SAFETY REPRESENTATIVE!**



# Hi!

We're happy to see that you wish to learn more about menstruation! In this folder, MENSEN provides information about:

-  menstruation from a work environment perspective,
-  how unsatisfactory conditions at work risk to negatively affect menstruating employees
-  how all of this is related to your engagement as safety representative in the workplace

We hope that the information will be helpful!

Questions? Feel free to get in touch with MENSEN!

 [www.mensen.se](http://www.mensen.se)

 [info@mensen.se](mailto:info@mensen.se)

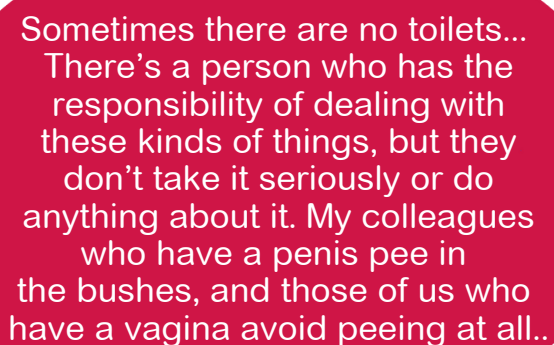
 [@mensen.se](https://www.instagram.com/mensen.se)

## Menstruation, work environment and discrimination

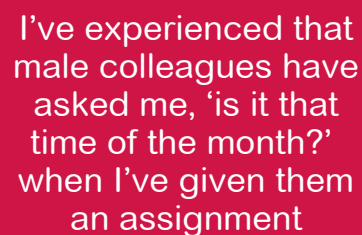
All menstruators have some basic needs in common that must be fulfilled for all of us to participate in social life on equal terms. People who menstruate need access to menstrual products and the possibility to hygienically manage their periods. There is a need for bathrooms with the proper equipment, as well as a general understanding of the menstrual cycle and how it can affect well-being.

In addition, individual needs could arise due to menstrual cycle-related illness, for example, if someone suffers from endometriosis or premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and have to take time off from work for a doctor's appointment.

Issues related to menstruation and menstruators in working life have clear links to more general workplace issues, such as access to toilets, workload and work climate.



Sometimes there are no toilets...  
There's a person who has the responsibility of dealing with these kinds of things, but they don't take it seriously or do anything about it. My colleagues who have a penis pee in the bushes, and those of us who have a vagina avoid peeing at all..



I've experienced that male colleagues have asked me, 'is it that time of the month?' when I've given them an assignment

Given that a majority of menstruators are women, there are also links between menstruation, workplaces and discrimination. Imagine a situation in which a person is subjected to harassment and derogatory language - such as "is it that time of the month?!" At first sight, such a comment may be perceived as innocent, but it is a type of harassment that is related to "sex", one of the protected grounds of discrimination.

## As a safety representative, this is what you can do...

So, what can you - as a safety representative - do to improve the situation for menstruating colleagues? Remember, it is the employer who has the formal responsibility to ensure that all employees are safe at work. The employer must work systematically to prevent illness and accidents (AFS 2001:1). According to the Discrimination Act (2008:567), the employer must also take preventive actions to prevent discrimination in the workplace.

As safety representative, you can ask questions and point out when things are not really working out:



**Ask your employer** what actions they are taking within the framework of the Systematic Work Environment Management to ensure the needs of menstruating employees are met.



**Ask your employer** how they are developing active measures to prevent discrimination of menstruating employees.






**Point out** potential workplace issues that could negatively affect menstruating employees. For example, if there are no bathrooms in the workplace, or bathrooms without sinks or menstrual products; a heavy workload that prevents you from taking a break; or if there are "period jokes" or other kinds of harassment of menstruators.

As a safety representative, you have the right to participate in so-called safety inspections where the work environment is reviewed.

When investigating the work environment, a checklist is often used to ensure that relevant areas are covered. On the next page, we give three examples of questions you and your employer can ask to cast light on the needs of menstruators.

# Safety inspection checklist

-  Are menstrual products offered and available near the bathrooms?
-  Do the bathrooms have trash bins and/or sanitary bags?
-  In relation to scheduling and staffing - is it taken into account that a person on their period need time to change menstrual products during the work day and an appropriate place to do it?

What your workplace needs to become menstruation-friendly is something employers and employees have to identify and discuss together, since every workplace has different needs. MENSEN will help you get the conversation started! Taken together, the following three steps cover both physical, organizational and social aspects of the work environment. We encourage you to share this information with your employer. Check out the 3 steps



## Equip the bathrooms and provide menstrual products

### **Are there bathrooms at your workplace? Are they equipped with sinks and a trash bin?**

At some workplaces, there are no bathrooms at all. This can cause a lot of stress for any employee who menstruates! When we need to use the bathroom, most of us can hold it until we find a toilet... However, a period doesn't work in the same way - when the menstrual cup/pad/tampon is full, the blood will leak out, no matter what.

Different menstruators prefer different menstrual products - some use pads, other tampons or a cup. Regardless of the product, they need to be changed (pads and tampons) or emptied (cups) regularly. To do this, there's a need for properly equipped bathrooms.

A sink is vital for employees to wash their hands or rinse their menstrual cup. There is also a need for trash bins to throw away the used tampons and pads. Menstrual products that are flushed down the toilet risk to cause clogged pipes - which is very expensive to fix.

### **Are menstrual products available at the workplace?**

Just as there is toilet paper available at any given workplace, menstrual products should be accessible. Though menstrual bleeding does return on a monthly basis, it can still be difficult to predict the exact day and time... and sometimes you simply forget to bring the box of tampons to work. With available menstrual products, all employees can feel safe, and no one will have to worry about leaking through their clothing or staining furniture.



Psst! Not everyone who bleeds is a woman. If the bathrooms are divided into "ladies" and "gents", it's important to keep the same equipment in all spaces. The majority of menstruators are women, but menstruation has nothing to do with the gender identity. There are women, men and non-binary people who menstruate. .



## Review the workload and create an open work climate

### **Do you have time to go to the bathroom during working hours?**

Functional bathrooms could be considered the foundation of a menstruation-friendly workplace. However, it's not only about the physical bathroom spaces - it is just as essential that employees actually have the possibility to take bathroom breaks during the day.

High workload is one problem, meaning that you have so much to do at work that you simply cannot leave. Another issue is when you don't have colleagues. Perhaps you're the only cashier at the checkout, or you're the only caretaker at work that day without any colleague who can hold the fort while you go to the bathroom.

The issue of access to bathrooms is not only a question of having to change pads/tampons or empty a menstrual cup. It is also about the basic need for a toilet - when menstruating, many people experience stomach problems such as diarrhea or constipation. It is the employer's responsibility to ensure that you can visit the bathroom when needed.

I barely got space to breathe at work, let alone take a break. I bled through more than once, sometimes I had to use a large incontinence pad to get by without having access to a toilet for more than 5 hours.

Eventually, it was unsustainable and I had to take sick leave those days. It was a big loss of income when I actually could have worked if I had been allowed to use the toilet regularly.

## Can you be open and talk about everything at work? Do you get the support you need?

Menstruation is a common bodily function, not a disease. Still, some people do experience menstrual cycle-related symptoms affecting their well-being, e.g. menstrual cramps or premenstrual syndrome (PMS). It's important to seek help if one experiences symptoms that negatively affect everyday life - menstruation should not be an obstacle to attending school or working.

At the same time, anyone experiencing illness should be able to get support from work and call in sick - irrespective of the issue being menstrual cycle-related or not.

If you have premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and feel anxious, there's a great risk that you will feel even worse in a workplace where people expect you to be a high-performing employee 8 hours a day and 5 days a week. Perhaps you even feel like you shouldn't be open with how you feel, which means that you spend all your energy trying to conceal the feelings. However, if you and your colleagues understand that well-being varies for everyone, it's more likely that you will be able to accept your condition and not have to put effort into hiding it.

No one should feel forced to openly speak about their menstrual cycle or the inconveniences that can arise from it. However, those of us who want to talk about it should be able to do so without fear or shame.

Of course, I don't mean that I should be able to 'unleash the PMS-fury' and everyone should just accept everything I do and say!

What I mean is rather that it would be much easier for me to deal with the psychological impact of PMS if I knew that others weren't judgemental and totally unaware of the phenomenon.





## Improve your menstrual knowledge

### **Do you know what happens in the body during the menstrual cycle?**

Different menstruators experience the menstrual cycle in different ways. Some barely notice it, while others suffer from menstrual illness.

Menstruating is not a negative thing in itself, although it can come with a lot of pain for some people - we shouldn't overlook the experiences of those who actually have major problems with their menstrual cycle. Still, in essence, menstruation is simply a common bodily function that many people need to deal with in their everyday lives.

### **Do you know what you can do to counteract menstrual taboos and prejudices?**

When talking about menstruation and work, we can see similarities with pregnancy: both questions about pregnancy and menstruation have long been left in the dark and not been given priority. There are also differences: when pregnant, you're legally protected from working on specific tasks in which the fetus is at risk of injury. You can also apply for pregnancy allowance. When it comes to menstruation, there are not such obvious risks at work. Rather, it is about more general work environment issues that can adversely affect our health and our well-being.

A majority of people who menstruate are women, but menstruation is not a separate women's issue. Menstruation has connections to all parts of an organization and to the work environment. As we saw in steps 1 and 2, menstruation is both about physical aspects of the work environment (properly equipped bathrooms), organizational aspects (the availability of the toilets) and social aspects (the possibility to discuss menstruation openly, if needed). In order to achieve this, both employers and employees must be involved, whether we are menstruators or not.

These are sensitive issues to address and I feel that my boss doesn't really understand the situation, even though I am open about having endometriosis and the problems that arise due to it.



This folder has been developed by Klara Rydström and Rebecka Hallencreutz within the framework of the project "Period Works!" (2020) and with financial support from the Swedish Gender Equality Agency. Illustrations and layout: Lovisa Zacrisson.

Since 2014, MENSEN - forum för menstruation is aiming for an equal society where the view on menstruation is overt, knowledge-based and free from taboos, prejudices and negative norms. MENSEN is a politically and religiously unaffiliated non-profit organization.

MENSEN offers short lectures and training sessions on how to create a menstruation-friendly workplace. Contact us for more info!



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