

ENDOMETRIOSIS IS A WORKPLACE ISSUE

YOUR UNION, UNITE, IS HERE TO HELP

WHAT IS ENDOMETRIOSIS?

Endometriosis is a long-term, chronic and often debilitating gynaecological condition in which tissue like the lining of the womb grows elsewhere in the body.

It affects around **1 in 10 women and those assigned female at birth of reproductive age in the UK**. Yet workers face an average **8–9-year delay in diagnosis**, largely due to poor awareness and delays in referral and investigation.

LACK OF AWARENESS

Research by Endometriosis UK highlights the scale of this problem with 56% of people unable to name a single symptom of the condition. This lack of awareness has real consequences at work, contributing to disbelief, stigma, and unfair treatment. Improving awareness is essential to ensure employers:

- Meet their legal duties
- Make reasonable adjustments at an early stage
- Protect workers' health, dignity, job security, and equality at work

SYMPTOMS OF ENDOMETRIOSIS

Symptoms can be severe, fluctuating, and invisible. They can worsen without warning and vary over time.

Common symptoms include:

- Severe pelvic, bladder and bowel pain
- Painful menstrual periods
- Chronic pain (not limited to periods)
- Extreme fatigue
- May affect fertility
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Pain when sitting, standing, or moving
- Brain fog and reduced concentration



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ENDOMETRIOSIS AND BAEM WOMEN

Women from **Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority** (BAEM) backgrounds can be significantly impacted by endometriosis, not because the condition is necessarily more biologically severe, but because it is **more likely to be under-recognised and under-treated**.

Endometriosis affects women of all ethnicities, yet research and clinical assumptions have historically centred on white women, leading to gaps in diagnosis and care for BAEM women.

- BAEM women often experience longer **delays in diagnosis**, sometimes waiting many years for their symptoms to be taken seriously
- Pelvic pain, heavy or painful periods, and fatigue may be normalised, dismissed, or attributed to stress or other conditions
- UK charity surveys suggest BAEM women are **underrepresented in patient data**, relative to the population

Cultural stigma around menstruation, reproductive health, and fertility can also discourage open discussion of symptoms, while unconscious bias in healthcare settings can result in pain being underestimated or inadequately treated.

IMPACT OF ENDOMETRIOSIS AT WORK

Endometriosis can affect:

- Attendance and punctuality during flare-ups
- Concentration, stamina, and productivity
- Ability to sit, stand, or work long hours
- Mental health due to chronic pain and stress
- Gender Pay Gap. Research from the **Office for National Statistics** finds that women with endometriosis may **earn less** on average following diagnosis

YOUR RIGHTS UNDER UK LAW

Under the **Equality Act 2010**, endometriosis may be classed as a disability if it has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on day-to-day activities.

This means workers may have the right to:

- Reasonable adjustments
- Protection from discrimination, harassment, and victimisation
- Fair treatment in absence management and performance processes

Workers do not need to disclose detailed medical information to be protected.

Employers also have duties under:

- The **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974** - to protect workers' health and wellbeing
- The **Employment Rights Act 1996** - protection from unfair treatment related to health

REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS AT WORK

Unite is clear that employers should agree to adjustments such as:

- Flexible start and finish times
- Home or hybrid working
- Extra or longer breaks
- Adjusted duties or workloads during flare-ups
- Ergonomic seating or ability to move
- Access to toilets, rest spaces, or heat pads
- Paid time off for medical appointments
- Absence linked to endometriosis must not trigger disciplinary action
- Workers must not be penalised for performance impacts related to symptoms
- Support should include access to counselling or Employee Assistance Programme (EAPs)

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO MANAGE THIS ALONE

Seeking medical advice as soon as possible can:

- Reduce delays in diagnosis
- Prevent symptoms from worsening
- Improve access to pain management fertility support, and appropriate treatment options

Keeping a record of symptoms and their impact on daily life can support clearer communication with healthcare professionals.

UNITE'S POSITION

Endometriosis is a workplace issue, not a personal failing. Having a model **workplace policy on endometriosis** is essential to ensure consistent, fair, and lawful treatment of workers across the organisation. Without a clear policy, support is often left to individual managers' discretion, leading to inconsistency, stigma, and the misuse of sickness or performance procedures.

TAKE ACTION - Email UniteWomen@unitetheunion.org for more information and to access Unite's model policy to introduce proper support in your workplace.
www.unitetheunion.org/equalities