



Pregnancy and fertility at work: a manager's guide.

Practical advice, useful tips and
expert insight to help everyone.

For your team's wellbeing.

September 2021

Introduction.

Here, we'll give an overview of how managers can be a vital source of support for pregnant employees and new parents in the workplace, as well as those who might be experiencing pregnancy or fertility problems.



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Supporting people during pregnancy

Problems with pregnancy

Infertility



Supporting a team member during their pregnancy

Employees don't legally need to tell their employer that they are pregnant until 15 weeks before their baby is due. But many choose to do so earlier than that, often after 12 weeks of pregnancy when the risk of miscarriage decreases.

After the initial congratulations, line managers can offer practical support and see whether any changes at work would help. Bear in mind that if a member of your team is pregnant they should ideally:

- take frequent breaks
- not work very long hours
- wear loose, comfortable clothes
- be able to put their feet up if they're swollen or uncomfortable – workplaces can provide foot rests to help with this

- have access to a fridge so they can bring food in from home, to maintain a healthy diet
- have help with lifting anything heavy
- be in a well-ventilated environment to prevent overheating and fainting.

Your organisation will have certain legal obligations to a pregnant employee. These include making reasonable adjustments to allow them to continue working, and providing suitable rest facilities in the workplace where they can lie down if needed.

At the same time as offering support, companies should strive not to take opportunities away from people while they're pregnant. Research has suggested that doing so can backfire, dent someone's confidence, and make it more likely they will leave their job.

Problems with pregnancy

Some pregnancies will have complications. This can include a range of conditions, such as diabetes during pregnancy (gestational diabetes) and pelvic pain.

Sadly, some people will lose their baby before, during or shortly after birth. This can naturally be devastating. Both parents are likely to need time off work, flexibility and a lot of understanding from their employer and colleagues.



Infertility

Around one in every seven couples will have problems conceiving despite trying for a year or more.

There are lots of different possible reasons for this, which can relate to one or both partners. In around a quarter of cases the cause of infertility simply isn't known.

Some people who have fertility problems choose to try in vitro fertilisation (IVF). This involves taking medication to encourage the ovaries to produce more eggs. The eggs are then fertilised outside the body using sperm, with one or two fertilised eggs then placed into the womb to grow. The whole process can take between one and two months, with the chances of success varying depending on a number of factors.

As with any personal issue, a colleague may choose not to disclose to anyone at work that they're going through IVF. But if you are their line manager and they do wish to discuss it with you, you can be sensitive and supportive by allowing them to work as flexibly as possible during this time.

There is no statutory right to time off during IVF. However, a combination of paid, unpaid and annual leave (as well as time off for appointments in line with your organisational policy) can really make a difference. It might be a good time to remind your colleagues of any emotional support services that your company provides, such as an employee assistance programme (EAP).



Find out more

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has more details about legal responsibilities for employers during pregnancy on its website, [equalityhumanrights.com](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com) as well as a helpful conversation guide for managers.

The stillbirth and neonatal charity, Sands, [sands.org.uk](https://www.sands.org.uk) has a guide called 'Information for employers - Helping a bereaved parent return to work', which you may find helpful if this situation occurs in your work place.

The charity Fertility Network UK offers guidance and training for employers. A webinar and factsheet are accessible through its website, [fertilitynetworkuk.org](https://www.fertilitynetworkuk.org)

Resources.

Sources

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