

INFORMATION SHEET

TALKING ABOUT YOUR ENDOMETRIOSIS WITH AN EMPLOYER

4 August 2021



ENDOMETRIOSIS AT A GLANCE

Endometriosis is a condition where tissue similar to the endometrium (the lining of the uterus) grows elsewhere in the body. This tissue responds to reproductive hormones where oestrogen stimulates patches forming superficial, lesions or endometrioma (ovarian cysts). Inflammation is generally present, and adhesions (scar tissue) can also form in response. Endometriosis within the muscle tissue of the uterus is known as adenomyosis, typically characterised by an enlarged uterus and heavy menstrual flow as well as pain at time of period.

As well as establishing a good relationship with your employer from the outset, it can help to understand employment law and best practice.

APPLYING FOR A JOB: YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

When applying for a job, you must answer honestly and accurately any questions you're asked that are relevant to your ability to do the job. But if you don't have to volunteer any information if there are no questions raised about relevant health conditions or impairments.

For example it is inappropriate to be asked "do you have any medical problems of any kind" but you can be asked "do you have any medical problems or disabilities that could affect your ability to do the job?"

If a health condition or impairment that you didn't mention does turn out to affect your ability to do the job, then the employer would deal with this as a performance. This means they need to give you a chance to improve, offering training or other support such as adapting the work environment; they cannot dismiss you or otherwise discipline you for not telling them about the health condition or impairment.

TALKING TO YOUR EMPLOYER

A good employer will be mindful of staff wellbeing. To ensure you are well and productive in your work, it may be helpful to talk to your employer about your endometriosis. Start by organising a meeting with your direct manager. If you are not comfortable speaking with your manager, consider speaking with someone else in the management team, someone from HR or your workplace health and safety team. If they need to know what endometriosis is, advise them of reputable websites including our own. It can be a good idea to take someone with you to support your self-advocacy.

If you are comfortable about sharing your symptoms and frequency of these this can give an understanding of what you experience on a regular basis and the impact on your work. Also consider sharing relevant aspects of your treatment and management plan.

Be clear that symptoms are different for each person and that at times of pain and fatigue you may find certain things challenging and you want to establish good communication to ensure you get the support you need to be productive in your role.

Respond openly and honestly to any questions they may ask but you need only share what you feel comfortable with. You don't have to share detailed, personal information – rather, focus on symptoms or concerns that directly affect your role.

Communicate to your employer any adjustment that may help you when you are experiencing endometriosis symptoms such as needing regular toilet breaks, being able to heat a wheat pack or hot water bottle, taking medication, being able to change from sitting to standing positions, being able to have regular breaks for gentle stretching.

There are going to be some days that you feel unable to attend work due to pelvic pain, fatigue or other endometriosis symptoms. Establish with your employer the criteria for staying home and what is tolerable and intolerable pain for you. If there is an opportunity to work from home on these days, discuss this possibility with your employer.

PRIVACY

Your employer requires your consent to share information about your health with other internal and external parties. If you would prefer that they did not discuss your medical situation with others, advise them of this. Your employer may be obligated to inform others on a 'need to know' basis if your health presents a workplace health and safety risk to yourself or others but they still need your consent for this.

EMPLOYMENT LAW

For further information about the legal aspects of employment, the Community Law website has quality up-to-date information (see reference below for details)

For further information:

- Insight Endometriosis: Endo 101 Factsheet
- Insight Endometriosis: Endometriosis Symptoms Factsheet
- Insight Endometriosis: Talking about your endometriosis with your partner
- Insight Endometriosis: Talking about your endometriosis with your place of education
- Insight Endometriosis: Talking about your endometriosis with your family and friends
- Insight Endometriosis: Advocating for Yourself Information Sheet

References:

- Community Law: <https://communitylaw.org.nz/community-law-manual/chapter-17-disability-rights/employment-access-to-jobs-and-protection-against-discrimination/applying-for-jobs-what-you-do-and-dont-have-to-say-about-your-impairment/>

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