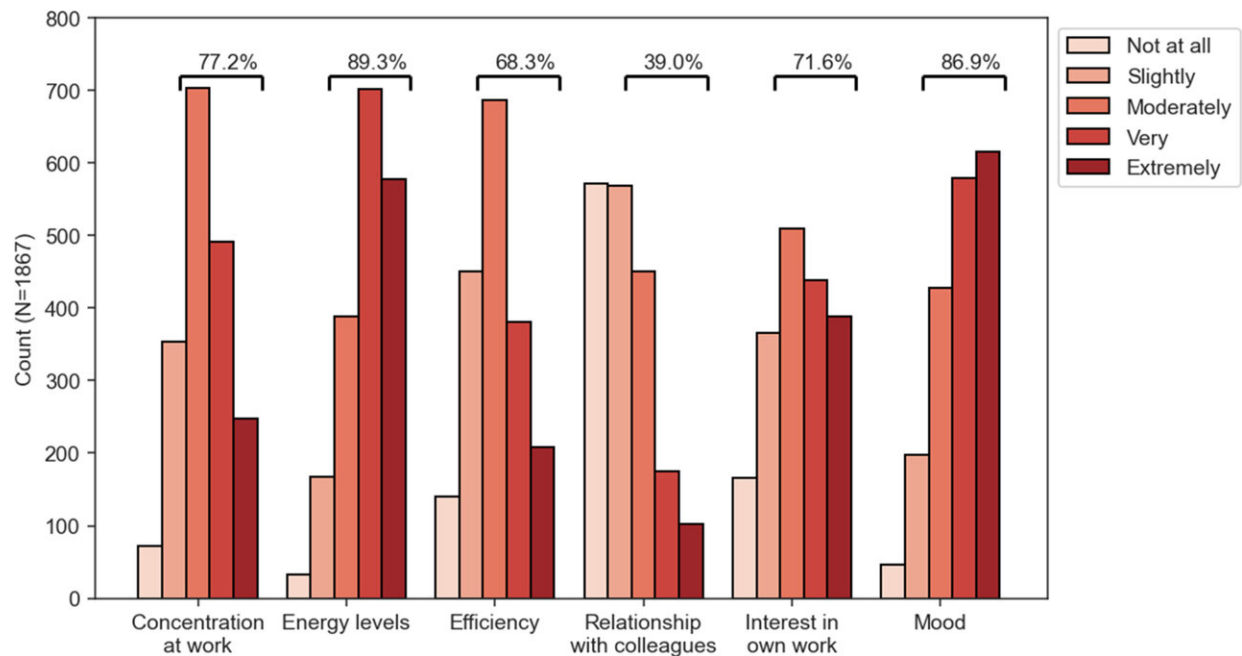


Menstrual symptoms hurt workplace productivity of many women, study finds

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Frequency of survey questions exploring the impact of the menstrual cycle on different dimensions of productivity. Percentages represent grouped responses from “Moderately” to “Extremely,” defining higher impact. Credit: *DIGITAL HEALTH* (2022). DOI: 10.1177/20552076221145852

Menstrual symptoms reduce the workplace productivity of many American women, with 45.2% reporting that their symptoms require them to take days off, according to a new UVA Health survey. The study also found that digital health apps can help women better manage their

menstrual symptoms, improve their productivity and reduce the amount of leave they need to take.

Significant majorities of [women](#) reported that menstrual symptoms had a moderate to severe effect on factors affecting their work, according to researchers from the UVA School of Medicine, Flo Health, University College London, Technische Universitaet Berlin and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. Affected areas include [energy levels](#) (89.3% of women surveyed), mood (86.9%), concentration (77.2%) and interest in their work (71.6%). Women who reported needing to take time off missed an average of 5.8 days of work.

"This study demonstrates that menstrual symptoms have a significant effect on women's lives," said Jennifer L. Payne, MD, the study's senior author and director of the Reproductive Psychiatry Research Program at the University of Virginia School of Medicine. "I think these results demonstrate just how resilient women are—they are able to continue to work and be productive despite the significant impact that menstrual symptoms have."

How digital apps could help

To better understand how menstrual symptoms affect work productivity, the researchers analyzed survey responses from 1,867 women ages 18 and older who use the Flo app, which helps women track their menstrual cycle or track their mood or [physical symptoms](#) during and after pregnancy. The three most reported menstrual symptoms were cramps (91%), fatigue (85%) and bloating (81%).

Many of the women surveyed did not feel supported by their workplace in dealing with these symptoms. According to the study, 49.7% did not feel they could talk freely about issues related to their menstrual cycle with their manager, while 48.4% said they did not receive support from

their manager for issues caused by their cycle. In addition, 94.6% reported not having any specific benefit or wellness program that could help.

What the researchers found could help, however, are digital health interventions such as the Flo app. More than half the women surveyed said the app helped them be prepared for and aware of their body's signals; feel supported; improve how they manage their period symptoms; and be more open with others about their symptoms and how they make them feel.

App users who found it helpful were 18% to 25% less likely to report that their menstrual symptoms affected their work productivity. Women who said the app helped them manage their symptoms, increase awareness of their body's signals, feel supported and improve their mood were 12% to 16% less likely to take days off.

"Organizations would do well to pay attention to this study and promote environments where women can feel comfortable in addressing their needs surrounding the [menstrual cycle](#)," Payne said. "Women are already doing the hard work of coping with [menstrual symptoms](#) on a monthly basis. Digital interventions geared toward minimizing women's [symptoms](#) and maximizing coping skills are one way organizations can support their women employees."

The paper is published in the journal *DIGITAL HEALTH*.

More information: Sonia Ponzio et al, Menstrual cycle-associated symptoms and workplace productivity in US employees: A cross-sectional survey of users of the Flo mobile phone app, *DIGITAL HEALTH* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/20552076221145852](https://doi.org/10.1177/20552076221145852)

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