



**DEAKIN**  
UNIVERSITY

DEAKIN INSTITUTE FOR  
**PHYSICAL ACTIVITY  
& NUTRITION**

DEAKIN CENTRE FOR  
**SPORT RESEARCH**

# SUPPORTING PARTICIPATION DURING PERIODS

A guide for sport and active recreation organisations



## Did you know:

- A large survey conducted by Deakin University has shown that more than half of people who menstruate have missed one or more training sessions for sport and active recreation due to their period.
- On average, people who menstruate will have their period for about 60-70 days per year - or some 450 periods across their lifespan. That adds up to a lot of missed sport and active recreation.
- Organisations can help create supportive environments to reduce the number of people missing out on the benefits of playing sport and participating in active recreation.



## What is the problem?

The survey found period symptoms (e.g. menstrual cramping/pain, bloating, fatigue, and mood changes etc) were the most common reason for missing training - 96% listed symptoms as a reason for missing training.

Concerns over leaking and reduced performance were also frequently reported. Those with heavy menstrual bleeding (about 20% of people who menstruate) reported missing more training and sport events.

Adolescents listed their period as the #1 barrier to sport participation.

Often survey participants were not aware of what is 'normal' for a period and/or what is available to support participation.



## What can organisations do to support people who menstruate?

Please use our checklist on the next page to see what your organisation is doing well and what changes could be made to support people who menstruate to participate in sport and active recreation more regularly. This may also help with retention of women and girls.

We've also provided some links to useful resources. Organisations are encouraged to either provide the links on your websites or print out and place the infographics strategically around facilities (for example, behind toilet doors, on club noticeboards etc).

# Supporting participation during periods: A checklist

	Yes	Yes Sometimes	No, we need to work on this	Not applicable	Comments or Actions
Toilet facilities are cleaned and maintained regularly.					
Toilet facilities are easily accessible / open when required.					
Toilets are private / lockable (e.g. cubicles).					
Toilet facilities contain adequate toilet paper.					
A sanitary bin (or similar) is provided in every toilet cubicle.					
Enough toilets are available for all genders to use.					
Enough hand washing basins with running water are available.					
Hand washing basins contain adequate supplies of soap / handwashing solution.					
Emergency sanitary items (e.g. pads and/or tampons) are available and participants are aware of the location of items.					
Consideration has been given to uniform/clothing options that are comfortable to wear during periods e.g. have dark coloured bottoms.					
Our policies include processes to refer people with period-related issues to relevant healthcare providers.					
Our organisation's policies support a culture of female participation and open communication about any barriers to participation.					
A process to share information with our community (e.g. newsletter, social media, noticeboards etc.) is included in our policy.					
A person in our organisation is responsible for ensuring actions are made to create supportive environments for period management.					

*To create more supportive facilities, you can discuss the change with your facility owner/manager and/or local council. If your organisation owns the facilities then you can implement the changes, after consideration is given to budgetary requirements.*

*For policy changes to create a more supportive environment you may wish to consult with the members of your organisation to understand their preferences (e.g. preferred options for emergency sanitary items, uniform/clothing)*



# Further resources

The following links to evidence-based information can be provided on your website or shared through other communications (e.g. newsletters).

Information about periods and managing symptoms (Note: this is not sport or exercise specific):  
<https://menstruationmatters.com.au>

Information about female athlete health on the Australian Institute of Sport Female Performance and Health Initiative website (Note: there is nothing specific about periods): <https://www.ais.gov.au/fphi/education>

## Appendices

We've developed three posters to support organisations and clubs to raise awareness of common issues identified in our large survey.

They can be printed out and placed strategically around your facilities (e.g. noticeboards, back of toilet doors, etc.) and/or shared through other communications (e.g. newsletters, social media). The posters include:

### Appendix A

What is a 'normal' menstrual cycle and period?

### Appendix B

Managing period bleeding during sport and exercise

### Appendix C

Managing menstrual cycle symptoms for sport and exercise

## Acknowledgements

This is a summary of research conducted by Deakin University titled 'Menstruation matters for participation in sport and active recreation'.

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# What is a 'normal' menstrual cycle and period?



## First period between 8-15 years

(\*Period length and menstrual cycle can vary for a couple of years after your first period)



## 21-35 days long\*

(start of your period until the day before your next period)



## Period for 3-7 days\*

(and bleeding/symptoms do not interfere with quality of life)

## Speak to your doctor about your period or menstrual cycle:

- If you haven't had your first period and are over 15 years old.
- If you notice changes to your cycle or think you might be pregnant.
- If your period has commenced but you have missed three or more cycles.
- If your menstrual cycle is not consistently occurring every 21 - 35 days.
- If you have heavy bleeding (e.g. changing heavy flow products every 1 - 2 hours, large clots) or bleeding longer than 7 days that interferes with your quality of life, including participation in sport or exercise.
- If you have abnormal bleeding between periods or after sex.
- If you are experiencing regular cyclical symptoms (e.g. severe menstrual pain, mood-related changes etc.) prior to or during your period that interferes with your quality of life, including participation in sport or exercise.

Tracking your cycle can help identify issues and plan for your period. Record the dates of your period and any symptoms in a diary or phone app (which can provide predictions for future periods).



# Managing period bleeding during sport and exercise

Managing period bleeding during sport and exercise can be challenging, but several products are available to use, with choices for heavier and lighter days of bleeding. Being prepared for your period can also help.

## Tips to help avoid leaking:

- Track your period with a phone app to help predict when your next period will arrive. Change period products frequently, including before starting sport or exercise.
- Combine internal and external products and/or use heavier flow products.
- Carry spare/emergency products and be aware of facilities to change or clean products.
- Consult your doctor for further guidance if you need to change products every 1-2 hours due to heavy bleeding.



### External products



#### Period underwear or swimwear

- Discreet and reusable, suitable for most types of exercise.
- Change at least every 8-12 hours (depending on flow).
- Requires rinsing and washing.
- Available to purchase online or at underwear / swimwear retailers.



#### Sanitary pads and liners

- Disposable (requires sanitary bin) and reusable options available.
- Change at least every 4-8 hours (depending on flow).
- Heavier flow/thicker pads may not be discreet.
- Not suitable for water activities, may not suit all types of movement.

### Internal products



#### Tampons

- Disposable, discreet and suitable for most types of sport or exercise.
- Change at least every 4 hours (depending on flow).
- Requires sanitary bins or sanitary bags for disposal.
- Available to purchase at most supermarkets and pharmacies.



#### Menstrual cups or discs

- Reusable, discreet and suitable for most types of sport and exercise.
- Change at least every 8-12 hours (depending on flow).
- Requires washing and sanitisation.
- Can require some practice with insertion and removal.
- Available to purchase online and at pharmacies.

# Managing menstrual cycle symptoms for sport and exercise

## Menstrual cycle symptoms:

- Are experienced by around 80% of active females.
- Can be physical (such as menstrual pain, digestive issues, fatigue, appetite changes) and/or mood-related (such as irritability).
- Typically occur in the week before and/or during your period.
- Can influence sport and exercise participation and performance.
- May be managed through various strategies in consultation with a relevant health professional (e.g. doctor, dietitian).



### Exercise

Can reduce menstrual pain and improve mood. Keep active, adjust training if required and/or try yoga, this may be the most effective for reducing symptoms.



### Nutrition

Eating a healthy diet and limiting intake of caffeine, alcohol, high sodium and processed foods may assist with reducing symptoms. Consult a dietitian for guidance.



### Medication

Discuss with your doctor suitability of analgesics, hormonal contraceptives and other medications to manage your symptoms.



### Dietary supplements

There is some evidence for fish oil, calcium, vitamins B6, D and E, ginger, zinc and curcumin. Please discuss safety and suitability with your doctor or dietitian.



### Other strategies

Some evidence suggests acupressure or a heat pack to the tummy or back may bring menstrual pain relief.

*Please consult your doctor if your menstrual cycle symptoms are affecting your daily activities and/or ability to participate in sport or exercise.*