

FAMILIES & CARERS GUIDE

Periods + Disability

A guide for families and carers



share*the*dignity

YOU ARE DOING MORE THAN YOU KNOW.

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT

57%

of people with disability learned what they know about managing their period from a parent or carer. That makes you the most important source of information in their life on this topic - not a doctor, not a teacher, not a coach. You. This guide is here to support you to do that role well, with confidence, and without shame.

Why this matters

Menstruation is already a topic that many families find difficult to talk about. When disability is part of the picture, the conversation becomes more complex - and more important.

People with disability face a compounded set of challenges when it comes to managing their period: products that don't suit their body, facilities that aren't accessible, sport environments that don't accommodate their needs, and almost no formal education or guidance designed specifically for them.

The Powering Participation research (Hanlon, Flowers, Mesagno & Share the Dignity, 2026) found that only 10% of people with disability had received any formal information about managing their period in sport. The rest were working it out alone - or relying on family and carers who were also working it out alone.

This guide is here to change that. It covers how to start the conversation, what products to consider by disability type, how to support participation in sport, and how to navigate the NDIS to access the products your family member needs.

HOW TO HAVE THE CONVERSATION

WHY it can feel hard

Periods are still a taboo topic in many families and communities. Add disability into the mix - and the complexity of bodies, products, and care arrangements that come with it - and it's understandable that many families put this conversation off, or never have it at all.

But silence has real consequences. Without information, people with disability are left to manage one of the most intimate aspects of their health without guidance, support, or the right tools. That affects their confidence, their comfort, their participation in sport, and their dignity.

WHEN to start

The conversation about periods should ideally happen before the first period arrives - so that when it does, it's not a shock. For people with disability, this is especially important because learning new routines and products takes more time, practice, and support.

Signs that the conversation is coming:

Pubic or underarm hair developing

Breast development beginning

Mood changes that weren't present before

Growth spurts

The average age of first period in Australia is 12 to 13 years, but it can occur as early as 9 or 10. Don't wait until it's urgent.

HOW to start

You don't need a perfect script. You need honesty, warmth, and willingness to have the conversation more than once. Here are some ways in:

"Something is going to start happening with your body soon, and I want to make sure you know about it before it does."

"I want to show you some things that will help you when your period starts - let's look at them together."

"Some of your friends might already have their period. It's totally normal, and we're going to figure out what works for you."

"I know this might feel embarrassing to talk about. That's okay - you can ask me anything."

How to adapt the conversation by disability type

Intellectual disability

Use simple, concrete language. Break the conversation into small pieces over multiple sessions. Use visual aids, social stories, or step-by-step guides with pictures. Practice the routine before the period starts - using water as a stand-in for blood if needed. Normalise it as a body process: "This happens to lots of people. It's normal. Here's what we do."

Physical disability

Focus the conversation on what's possible, not what isn't. Be honest that some standard products may not work for their body, and that adaptive alternatives exist. Trial products together before the period arrives. Discuss who will help with product management if independence is limited, and establish a routine that preserves as much privacy and dignity as possible.

Autism / neurodivergence

Be direct and factual - avoid metaphor or vague language. Many autistic people prefer explicit, matter-of-fact explanations. Introduce products slowly and allow time to adjust to new sensations before the period arrives. Create a consistent, visual routine that reduces uncertainty. Use the same products every time where possible to minimise sensory unpredictability.

Psychosocial disability

Acknowledge that periods can intensify feelings of anxiety, depression, or mood changes because of hormonal fluctuations. Validate that this is real and not imagined. Create a simple period plan together: what products will be used, what to do if they need to leave school or sport, who to call. Reduce decision-making pressure during the period itself.

What to say when it actually arrives

The first period often arrives at an unexpected moment - at school, at sport, at a friend's house. Your calm response can matter more than your words.

Some things that help:

Stay calm and matter-of-fact:
"This is your period. We were expecting this. Here's what we do."

Have a period kit already prepared and somewhere they know about.

If it happens away from home, have a plan in place: who to call, what to say to a teacher or coach.

Follow up with a proper conversation once the immediate moment has passed.

PRODUCTS BY DISABILITY TYPE

See **Period & Disability Education Resources - Products + NDIS** for a full product guide.

Here's a quick-reference summary for families and carers, focused on what to consider when choosing products for someone you support.



	Products likely to work well	What to watch for
Intellectual disability	Adaptive period underwear (simple routine, no adhesive or insertion), reusable pads with snap fastening, visual step-by-step routine card.	Cognitive overload with complex products - keep it simple and consistent. Allow plenty of time to learn the routine before the first period.
Autism / neurodivergence	Seamless adaptive underwear (no crinkle, no adhesive), menstrual cup or disc (once comfortable - eliminates ongoing sensory input), consistent same-brand products.	Sensory sensitivities to texture, smell, sound of wrappers - trial products carefully. Introducing too many new products at once can be overwhelming.
Physical disability / limited dexterity	Adaptive underwear with loops or side openings, applicator tampons, adaptive tampon inserters, reusable snap pads.	Fine motor challenges with adhesive tabs, positioning of internal products, and pulling clothing up and down. May need carer assistance - establish a dignified routine.
Wheelchair use	High-absorbency adaptive underwear, menstrual cup or disc (seated use), heating pads for cramps.	Seated position affects flow and leakage - standard pads are often ineffective. Extended time in chair without changing is a real risk - plan accordingly.
Psychosocial disability	Adaptive underwear (low decision-making, easy routine), pre-prepared period kit to reduce anxiety, heating pads.	Hormonal fluctuations can significantly amplify anxiety and mood changes. Build a predictable, low-stress routine and reduce decision-making during the period itself.

NDIS and product funding

Since October 2024, adaptive menstrual products are formally recognised as NDIS-fundable supports under assistive products for personal care and safety. Many families are not aware of this.

See **Period & Disability Education Resources - Products + NDIS** for a step-by-step guide to accessing this funding. If your family member is on the NDIS, raise this at their next planning meeting.





SUPPORTING PARTICIPATION IN SPORT

The numbers tell the story

ONLY
12%

of women with disability currently participate in sport. Menstruation is a significant contributing factor.

37%

of those who do participate have skipped a session because they didn't have the right products.

As a family member or carer, you are often the one who makes participation possible - or not.

Before sport day: the preparation routine

Confidence in managing periods during sport is built through preparation. Help your family member develop a pre-sport routine that becomes second nature.

Check the calendar



Know where in the cycle they are before sport day. Period tracking apps with simple interfaces can help, or a physical calendar marked at home.

Choose the right product for the sport



Swimming needs period swimwear or an internal product. High-impact sport needs a secure, non-bulky option. See **Period & Disability Education Resources - Periods + Sport**

Pack the period kit



Backup product, wipes, disposal bag, pain relief if needed, change of underwear. Keep a dedicated kit bag so nothing gets forgotten.

Take pain relief before leaving



If cramps are an issue, pain relief taken before the session is more effective than waiting until pain has started.

Set reminders



For people with executive functioning challenges or reduced sensation, a phone timer to check and change products during or after sport can be a game-changer.

Know the facility



Check in advance whether accessible bathrooms are available, whether there are sanitary bins, and whether there is a shelf or table for independent product management.



What to do if sport facilities aren't accessible

Accessible bathrooms at sports facilities frequently lack the infrastructure needed for people with disability to manage their period independently - no sanitary bins, no shelf, insufficient space for wheelchair transfers.

As a family member or carer, you have the right to advocate for change. Here's how:

- ▶ Speak to the facility manager directly and request a shelf be installed in the accessible bathroom. It is a low-cost, high-impact change.
- ▶ Ask your club's committee to raise accessible bathroom standards at their next meeting.
- ▶ Contact your local council if the facility is council-owned - accessible bathroom standards are a council responsibility.
- ▶ Contact your state sporting body if club-level advocacy isn't working.
- ▶ Document your requests in writing so there is a record.

Talking to coaches and club staff

You should not need to share your family member's full medical history with a coach. But a brief, matter-of-fact conversation can make a significant difference to how they are supported on the day.

What to say to a coach or club

"[Name] has a disability that affects how they manage their period. On some days they may need a few extra minutes before or during a session, or they may need to modify their activity. We'd appreciate your understanding and flexibility."

"If [Name] tells you they need to step out, please just let them go without a lot of questions - they'll be back as soon as they can."

"We'd love to know where the accessible bathroom is located and whether it has everything they might need."

NAVIGATING THE NDIS

Many families and carers are unaware that the NDIS can fund adaptive menstrual products for people with disability. The research found that **71–81%** of NDIS participants with disability had no idea this support existed.

What is covered

Since October 2024, adaptive menstrual products are formally listed as NDIS supports under Schedule 1, Item 9: Assistive products for personal care and safety. This includes adaptive period underwear, tampon applicators, and adaptive tampon inserters where the need is directly related to the participant's disability.

How to raise it at a planning meeting

At your family member's next NDIS planning meeting, raise the following:

- ▶ Explain how their disability affects their ability to use standard period products.
- ▶ Request that adaptive menstrual products be included in their plan under assistive products for personal care and safety.
- ▶ Ask for a specific budget line that covers ongoing supply of these products.
- ▶ If you are met with resistance, reference the NDIS Transitional Rules 2024, Schedule 1, Item 9(d).

If you are denied

You have the right to request an internal review of any NDIS planning decision. You can also contact:

- ▶ Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA): wwda.org.au
- ▶ Your state or territory's disability advocacy service
- ▶ The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission if you believe the process has been unfair.



Accessing the right products and support is not a luxury. *It is a matter of dignity, health, and the right* to participate fully in life - including sport. You are your family member's most powerful advocate. Use that.

Resources and support

- ▶ **Share the Dignity:** sharethedignity.org.au/advocacy/bloody-good-sport
- ▶ **Women With Disabilities Australia:** wwda.org.au
- ▶ **NDIS participant information:** ndis.gov.au
- ▶ **Carer Gateway:** carergateway.gov.au
- ▶ **True (relationships and sexuality education for people with disability):** true.org.au

*No one should be excluded from sport
- or from life - because of their period.*



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