

SPORT-SPECIFIC GUIDE

Periods + Sport

Sport-by-sport guide for people with disability



share*the*dignity

YOUR SPORT. YOUR PERIOD. YOUR WAY.

Why this guide exists

67%

of people with disability who participate in sport have skipped a session because of their period.

37%

specifically because they didn't have the right products for their sport.

This guide is built around the sports that matter most to this community - with honest, practical, disability-aware advice for each one.

Managing a period during sport is challenging for everyone. For people with disability, the challenge is compounded - by products that don't suit your body, facilities that don't accommodate your needs, uniforms that increase anxiety, and environments that can be sensory and logistical minefields.

This guide doesn't offer generic advice. Each sport section covers the products most likely to work, practical tips for preparation and facilities, uniform considerations, and disability-specific notes drawn directly from the lived experiences of people with disability who menstruate.

Before you start

Research shows that confidence in period management during sport comes from preparation. Whatever sport you do, consider building a period kit to take with you.



What to include in your preparation kit



Your preferred period product plus one backup option



A change of underwear or shorts



Pain relief (if you use it) taken before you leave home



A portable heating pad if cramps are a factor for you



Wipes and a small disposal bag



A phone reminder to change products if you have executive functioning challenges



**NOW
LET'S GET
INTO THE
SPORTS.**

SWIMMING

The most popular sport in the disability community
- and the biggest flashpoint for period anxiety.

The reality

44% of people with disability who play sport swim - making it the most common activity in this community. It's also the sport that causes the most period-related anxiety and dropout. Many people with disability cannot use tampons or menstrual cups, which have historically been the only water-safe products available.

This left swimmers with disability facing an impossible choice: **miss the session, or find another way.**



Products for swimming

The good news, period swimwear changes everything.

Period swimwear uses multi-layered, liquid-locking technology built into the swimsuit itself - the same technology as period underwear, designed to work in water. It absorbs menstrual flow from the inside while you swim, with no need for any internal product. It looks identical to regular swimwear.

For people with disability who cannot physically or sensorily tolerate tampons or menstrual cups, period swimwear is not just a convenience - it is the product that makes swimming possible.



Period swimwear

The recommended option for anyone who cannot use internal products. Built-in absorbent gusset (holds up to 2-3 tampons' worth of flow), dark lining for confidence, snug fit to prevent leaks, available in one-piece and two-piece styles.



Menstrual cup

For those who can tolerate insertion, cups can stay in for up to 12 hours and are fully waterproof. No string visible, no leakage in water. Can be a good option paired with period swimwear for very heavy flow days.



Menstrual disc

Sits differently to a cup (higher in the vaginal fornix) and may suit people for whom cups are uncomfortable or anatomically difficult.



Applicator tampon

For those who can use internal products but need assistance with insertion. Use with an adaptive inserter if dexterity is limited.



NOT recommended: standard pads

These do not work in water and will absorb pool water rather than menstrual flow.

Preparation & facility tips

- ▶ Change into your period swimwear at home before leaving if possible - this eliminates the need to manage product changes in an unfamiliar or inaccessible changing room.
- ▶ If you need to change at the facility, check accessible change room availability before you arrive. Call ahead if needed.
- ▶ Accessible change rooms at many facilities lack shelving - bring a portable hook or suction cup shelf to hang your bag and manage products without needing to use the floor.
- ▶ If you use a cup or disc, empty and rinse at home before your session where possible, to avoid the need to clean in public facilities.
- ▶ Use a timer or phone alarm to remind yourself to check your product after your session, particularly if you have reduced sensation or executive functioning challenges.
- ▶ Keep a dry bag in your swim kit for wet or used swimwear.

Disability-specific notes

- ▶ **Wheelchair users**
Period swimwear is particularly effective for wheelchair users as it manages flow in a seated position without the leakage risk that standard pads carry in that position.
- ▶ **Sensory sensitivities**
Period swimwear involves no crinkle, no adhesive, no insertion, and no string - making it the most sensory-friendly option for autistic swimmers or those with tactile sensitivities.
- ▶ **Reduced sensation**
If you cannot feel when a leak has occurred, period swimwear's built-in protection combined with a dark swimsuit provides the safest option. Set a timer for product checks.
- ▶ **Heavy flow / endometriosis**
Pair period swimwear with a menstrual cup or disc on heaviest days for maximum protection during longer sessions.
- ▶ **Executive functioning challenges**
Period swimwear eliminates the need to remember multiple steps - put it on, swim, wash it. Routine simplicity is a genuine advantage.

Real talk from the research:

“I can’t use tampons and swimming is my major exercise. I wish I’d been told about period swimwear 10 years ago.”

If this is you - now you know. Period swimwear exists, it works, and it can be funded through the NDIS. See **Period & Disability Education Resources - Products + NDIS** for details.

GYM & FITNESS WORKOUTS

Best products for this sport



Adaptive period underwear

High-absorbency, seamless options work well under gym attire.



Menstrual cup or disc

Stays in place during movement, no string, no leakage risk.



Single-use pads with wings

For lighter days or as backup.



Avoid: light-absorbency pads

These are not recommended during high-intensity sessions or inverted movements.

Uniform considerations

- ▶ Most gym attire is flexible - choose darker coloured leggings on heavier days.
- ▶ Seamless adaptive underwear sits discreetly under fitted gym wear.
- ▶ Avoid white or very light-coloured shorts on heavy flow days.

Preparation & facility tips

- ▶ Change at home before your session where possible.
- ▶ Use a locker rather than leaving your bag in open areas for privacy.
- ▶ Gyms often have single-person accessible bathrooms - request access if needed.
- ▶ Take pain relief before arriving if cramps are likely to affect your session.
- ▶ Ask staff about accessible bathroom locations when you arrive - not mid-session.

Disability-specific notes

- ▶ **Sensory**
Seamless period underwear with no adhesive or string is ideal for sensory-sensitive gym-goers.
- ▶ **Physical disability / dexterity**
Menstrual cups or discs reduce the need for frequent product changes during a session.
- ▶ **Fatigue-related conditions (MS, chronic fatigue)**
On high-fatigue days, lighter exercise in the luteal phase is evidence-supported - give yourself permission to modify.
- ▶ **Wheelchair users**
Adaptive period underwear works well in a seated position.

PILATES & YOGA



Best products for this sport



Menstrual cup or disc

Ideal for inverted poses (limited to no leakage risk regardless of position).



Adaptive period underwear

For non-inverted sessions or lighter days.



Avoid: pads during inversions (downward dog, shoulder stand)

As gravity reversal can cause leaks.

Uniform considerations

- ▶ Fitted activewear in darker colours is standard in these environments - choose accordingly on heavier days.
- ▶ Loose pants or wide-leg yoga pants provide more coverage and flexibility for different body types and mobility aids.

Preparation & facility tips

- ▶ Studios often have single-person bathrooms - arrive early to locate and check accessibility.
- ▶ Many pilates and yoga studios are smaller and quieter than gyms - lower sensory load, which can help with self-care management.
- ▶ Let your instructor know if you need to step out - you don't need to explain why.
- ▶ Consider a blanket or towel over your mat for extra confidence.

Disability-specific notes

- ▶ **Sensory**
The quieter, lower-stimulus environment of yoga and pilates studios is often more manageable for neurodivergent participants.
- ▶ **Pelvic floor conditions**
Some pilates movements target the pelvic floor, which can feel different during menstruation. Let your instructor know if certain exercises are uncomfortable - modifications are standard practice.
- ▶ **Pain management**
Yoga and pilates are evidence-supported for reducing menstrual cramp severity - gentle movement during menstruation can actually help.
- ▶ **Fatigue conditions**
Restorative yoga in particular is compatible with high-fatigue days.

RUNNING & ATHLETICS

Best products for this sport



Menstrual cup or disc

Most secure option for high-impact, repetitive movement.



Adaptive period underwear

With secure fit and high absorbency for longer runs.



Tampon with applicator

If tolerated, secure and low-profile for competition.



Avoid: bulky pads

They can shift, chafe, and leak during sustained running.

Uniform considerations

- ▶ Running shorts and tights in darker colours significantly reduce anxiety about visible leaks.
- ▶ Compression shorts or tights over period underwear add an extra layer of security and discretion.
- ▶ For competition: check whether your event uniform policy allows shorts or tights underneath - many athletics bodies now permit this.

Preparation & facility tips

- ▶ Plan your route or race venue to identify accessible bathroom locations before you start.
- ▶ For outdoor or trail running, carry a small zip-lock bag with a backup product and wipes.
- ▶ Take pain relief before your run rather than mid-session.
- ▶ If you compete, check whether event facilities have accessible changing rooms and plan ahead.
- ▶ At athletics clubs, speak to a female team manager or coach if you need support - you shouldn't have to manage alone.

Disability-specific notes

- ▶ **Prosthetic limb users**
The pelvic shift caused by some prosthetics can affect how products sit. Menstrual cups or discs may be more stable than pads or tampons in this context.
- ▶ **Reduced sensation**
Use a timer to track when products need changing, particularly during longer runs.
- ▶ **ADHD / executive functioning**
Set a pre-run checklist so product management becomes automatic rather than something to remember in the moment.
- ▶ **Endometriosis / heavy flow**
Running can temporarily reduce cramp pain through endorphin release, but heavy flow days may warrant shorter or modified sessions.

EQUESTRIAN

Best products for this sport



Menstrual cup or disc

Most secure for sustained seated activity, no product movement during riding.



Adaptive period underwear

Must be genuinely high-absorbency and secure-fitting; bulky products show under breeches.



Seamless, neutral-coloured adaptive underwear

Visible lines or bulk under white breeches is a major source of anxiety for this community.



Avoid: standard pads

Shift and bunch during riding, increase leak risk and visible bulk.

Uniform considerations

- ▶ White breeches are the single most-cited uniform anxiety trigger in this community from the research.
- ▶ Neutral-coloured, seamless adaptive underwear is the priority here - skin tone or light grey under white causes less visible outline than black.
- ▶ Advocate to your club for flexibility on competition day - some riders layer with base layer shorts.
- ▶ Check whether your discipline's rules allow alternative coloured base layers in competition - this is evolving.

Preparation & facility tips

- ▶ Change at home or at the stables before mounting where possible.
- ▶ Stables and equestrian facilities often have limited accessible bathroom infrastructure - check in advance.
- ▶ Carry a period kit in your grooming bag or horse box rather than leaving it in a shared tack room.
- ▶ If pain or fatigue is significant, lighter work (groundwork, walking) is a valid adaptation.

Disability-specific notes

- ▶ **Physical disability / dexterity**
Changing products independently in stable environments can be extremely difficult. Plan product type around minimising changes needed during your ride.
- ▶ **Wheelchair users who ride adapted equestrian**
The seated position during riding is different to standard wheelchair position - high-absorbency adaptive underwear and menstrual cups work best.
- ▶ **Sensory**
The physical sensation of riding combined with period discomfort can compound sensory overload - familiar products and routines reduce one variable.
- ▶ **Psychosocial**
The social and visible nature of equestrian competition heightens leak anxiety. Preparation and product confidence are the most effective anxiety reduction strategies.

TEAM SPORTS

Basketball, netball, football, hockey and others

Best products for this sport



Menstrual cup or disc

For high-movement sports where product stability matters



Adaptive period underwear

Under standard uniform shorts or skirts



Tampon with applicator

If tolerated, low-profile under team uniform



Compression shorts over period underwear

Adds security and reduces visible outline under skirts or short shorts

Uniform considerations

- ▶ Team uniforms are often non-negotiable in competition - plan your product to suit your uniform, not the other way around.
- ▶ Compression shorts under skirts or shorts are widely accepted in most team sports - check your sport's uniform policy if you're unsure.
- ▶ Advocate to your club for dark-coloured or flexible uniform options on training days.

Preparation & facility tips

- ▶ Talk to your team manager or a trusted teammate before game day - having someone who knows means you're not managing alone.
- ▶ Locate accessible bathrooms at the venue before the match starts.
- ▶ Ask your club whether they stock period products in the change room - and advocate for this if they don't (see **Period & Disability Education Resources - Coaches and facility staff guide** for what to say).
- ▶ For away games, check venue accessibility in advance where possible.
- ▶ If you need to come off during a game, you are entitled to do so - no explanation required.

Disability-specific notes

- ▶ **Wheelchair basketball / wheelchair sports**
See the next page for the dedicated wheelchair sports section.
- ▶ **Sensory**
Changing rooms before team sports can be high-sensory environments. Arrive early or change separately if the noise and activity of a full change room is overwhelming.
- ▶ **Psychosocial anxiety**
Having a trusted teammate or staff member who knows your situation significantly reduces period anxiety in team sport contexts - you don't have to disclose to everyone, just one person.
- ▶ **Physical disability**
Seated team sports involve sustained periods in one position - high-absorbency adaptive underwear or menstrual cups are the most reliable options.

WHEELCHAIR SPORTS

Basketball, tennis, racing, rugby and others

Best products for this sport



High-absorbency adaptive period underwear

Specifically designed for seated use, where standard pads shift and standard period underwear may not provide sufficient coverage for extended time in a sports wheelchair.



Menstrual cup or disc

If insertion is possible, provides long-duration protection (up to 12 hours) with no leakage risk in a seated position.



Heating pads

Wearable options can be used pre-game for cramp relief.



Avoid: standard pads

Particularly problematic in sports wheelchairs where sitting position, cushion type, and sustained game time make leakage almost inevitable.

Uniform considerations

- ▶ Sports wheelchair seat cushions and harness systems can interact with period products - trial your product at home in your chair before game day.
- ▶ Dark-coloured base layers or shorts under your uniform provide confidence without violating most wheelchair sport uniform policies.
- ▶ Talk to your team's equipment officer or physiotherapist if product bulk is affecting your positioning or comfort in the chair.

Preparation & facility tips

- ▶ In sports wheelchairs, product changes mid-game are often not possible - choose a product rated for the full duration of your session.
- ▶ Transfer to accessible bathroom before your session - don't wait until you need to change.
- ▶ Accessible bathrooms at sports facilities frequently lack the shelf or table needed for independent product management during a wheelchair transfer. Advocate to your club or facility for this. It is a reasonable and necessary modification.
- ▶ If you have a support worker or carer, brief them on your product and routine before you arrive at the venue.
- ▶ Set a timer as a reminder to check your product after each game or session, particularly if you have reduced sensation below the waist.

Disability-specific notes

- ▶ **Reduced or no sensation below the waist**
This is perhaps the most critical disability-specific challenge in this section. Without sensation, you cannot feel when leaking is occurring. High-absorbency products, timed checks, and dark clothing are all essential management strategies.
- ▶ **Extended game time**
Wheelchair basketball quarters, tennis sets, and rugby matches can run for extended periods. Product choice must account for maximum duration, not average use.
- ▶ **Independence in product management**
The absence of shelving or tables in accessible bathrooms is not a minor inconvenience - it is a structural barrier to independent self-care. You have the right to advocate for this at your facility.
- ▶ **NDIS**
High-absorbency adaptive period underwear specifically required for wheelchair sport participation is fundable under the NDIS. See **Period & Disability Education Resources - Products + NDIS** for details.

THE FACILITY PROBLEM

The research is clear:

81% of people with disability feel confident managing their period at home.

That drops to

27% at sports facilities. The environment itself is a significant barrier - not just the products.

What you're likely to encounter - and how to manage it

Accessible bathrooms without shelving or tables

The single most commonly cited facility barrier for people with disability who menstruate. Without a shelf or table in an accessible bathroom, independent product management during a wheelchair transfer is extremely difficult or impossible.

- ▶ Bring a portable suction hook or foldable shelf insert if you use facilities regularly.
- ▶ Advocate to your facility management for a shelf in accessible bathrooms - it is a simple, low-cost modification with significant impact.
- ▶ Contact your state sporting body or local council if your facility repeatedly fails on this - you have the right to accessible facilities.

No sanitary bins in accessible bathrooms

A common and frustrating gap. Accessible bathrooms are often treated as afterthoughts in facility design.

- ▶ Carry small disposal bags so you can remove used products discreetly.
- ▶ Report the absence of sanitary bins to facility management - this is a basic hygiene requirement, not a special request.

Unsanitary conditions

Dirty or poorly maintained facilities increase period anxiety significantly - and for people with disability who may need to use surfaces or floors during product changes, the stakes are higher.

- ▶ A small, portable mat or towel in your kit can help when facilities are substandard.
- ▶ For people with assistance dogs: confirm with the facility in advance whether your dog can accompany you into the bathroom - and advocate for this if it's not their standard practice.

High-sensory environments

For neurodivergent people, busy, noisy change rooms and facilities can trigger sensory overwhelm that makes period management significantly harder.

- ▶ Arrive early to use facilities before they fill up.
- ▶ Use noise-reducing earbuds or headphones while in changing areas if this helps.
- ▶ Set phone reminders to check and change products - in a high-sensory environment, body awareness can go offline.
- ▶ Brief a trusted companion, teammate, or carer on your routine so they can prompt you if needed.

Needing to discuss your period with staff

55% of people with disability who needed to raise their period with sports staff felt embarrassed to do so. Only 26% found staff to be supportive.

You are not obliged to explain your medical situation in detail. Simple, direct language is enough:

- ▶ "I need access to the accessible bathroom urgently."
- ▶ "I need a few minutes before we start - I'll be right back."
- ▶ "Is there a sanitary bin in the accessible bathroom? If not, can that be fixed?"

If staff are unsupportive or dismissive, you can escalate to a club manager or contact your state sporting body. No one should feel embarrassed for managing a natural bodily function.

No one should miss out on sport because of their period. Not once. Not ever.



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