

# Periods + Disability

What every coach and facility staff  
member needs to know

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# HEY COACH

## LET'S TALK ABOUT PERIODS AND DISABILITY.

### Why this matters to you

ONLY  
**26%**

of people with disability who needed to discuss their period with sports staff found those staff to be supportive.

**55%**

felt embarrassed to raise it at all.

**61%**

had no idea whether staff would be supportive or not.

That's not a small gap - it's a systemic one.  
And you have the power to change it.



# What you need to understand first

Periods affect performance, participation, and confidence. You already know this from coaching female athletes generally. For athletes with disability, the challenge is compounded in ways that most coaches have never been trained to understand.

## Physical disability

Standard products may be impossible to use independently due to limited dexterity, range of motion, or anatomy. Your athlete may need extra time, accessible facilities, or a specific product type that takes longer to manage.

## Autism / neurodivergence

The sensory environment of sport facilities - noise, lighting, people - can make self-care tasks overwhelming. Your athlete may forget to manage their period entirely when they're in a high-sensory environment. This is not laziness or lack of preparation - it's neurobiology.

## Reduced or no sensation

Some athletes cannot feel when they are leaking. This is not something they can control, and the anxiety it creates is significant. A matter-of-fact, calm response from you if this happens is one of the most powerful things you can do.

## Psychosocial disability

Anxiety and depression can be significantly intensified by hormonal fluctuations during the menstrual cycle. An athlete who seems more withdrawn, anxious, or fatigued around their period is not being difficult - they are managing something real.

## What to say and what NOT to say

### SAY THIS

"Take whatever time you need  
- we'll be here when you're back."

"I've got some period products in my  
kit if you need them."

"If there's anything that would help  
you today, just let me know."

"That's completely fine - let's just  
adapt the session."

"I understand. Take the time you  
need." (if they mention their period)

### NOT THIS

"You'll be fine, just push through it."

"Did you forget to bring what you  
need?"

"What's wrong with you today?"

"You should have planned better."

"Too much information!"  
or any visible discomfort

## What language to use

Language matters. Here's a quick guide:

- ▶ **Use 'period'** - not 'time of the month', 'that time', or any euphemism. Normalising the word normalises the conversation.
- ▶ **Use person-first language:** 'an athlete with disability' rather than 'a disabled athlete' or 'a disabled person' - unless your athlete has expressed a preference for identity-first language.
- ▶ **Don't assume. Ask:** 'Is there anything you need from me today?' is always better than assuming you know what someone needs.
- ▶ **Keep it matter-of-fact.** Periods are normal. Treat them that way and your athletes will feel safer raising the topic with you.
- ▶ **Don't make it a big deal** - and don't make it invisible either. A simple acknowledgement and a practical response is all that's needed.

# How to respond if an athlete raises their period

If an athlete with disability tells you they have their period, or that it's affecting them:

## Stay calm and matter-of-fact

Your reaction sets the tone. If you're uncomfortable, they'll feel it. A neutral, warm response is important.

## Ask what they need

"What would be most helpful right now?" Some athletes need time. Some need a product. Some just need you to know and say that it's okay.

## Offer practical support

Know where the accessible bathroom is. Have period products in your kit. Offer to adapt the session if needed.

## Don't ask for details

You don't need to know how heavy their flow is or what product they use. Keep it practical and respectful.

## Follow up quietly

At the end of the session, a simple 'How are you going?' shows you care without making it a bigger deal than it needs to be.

# If an athlete has a leak

Leaks happen. They happen to athletes without disability too. For athletes with disability who may not be able to feel when a leak is occurring, the fear of this is one of the biggest barriers to participation in sport.

If a leak happens during your session:

- ▶ Act quickly and discreetly. The faster it's resolved, the less distress for the athlete.
- ▶ Have a spare pair of shorts or leggings in your kit. This is not excessive - it's good coaching.
- ▶ Move the conversation away from others: "Hey, can I have a quick word?" and handle it privately.
- ▶ Don't draw attention to it. Don't let other athletes draw attention to it either - address it if they do.
- ▶ Afterwards, check in: "That happens to everyone sometimes - are you okay?"

# CREATING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

As a coach or facility staff member, here's your practical checklist:

- ▶ Keep period products in your coaching kit or in the change room. Pads, tampons, and adaptive period underwear where possible.
- ▶ Know where the accessible bathroom is at your facility. Check it has a sanitary bin. Advocate for a shelf or table if it doesn't.
- ▶ Have a spare pair of dark shorts or leggings available for emergencies.
- ▶ Build flexible training options into your program. Some days, a modified session is the right call - for any athlete.
- ▶ If your club has a uniform policy that doesn't accommodate period management - especially for athletes with disability - raise it with your committee.
- ▶ Don't require athletes to explain or justify needing to step out of a session. Trust them.
- ▶ Normalise the topic by being the one to raise it first: "Just a reminder that if anyone needs anything during today's session, including period products, just let me know."
- ▶ If you're a male coach, don't use that as a reason to avoid the topic. Your athletes need your support regardless of your gender.

## The bigger picture

Sport has enormous physical and mental health benefits. Currently, only 12% of women with disability participate in sport. Menstruation is one of the contributing factors to that number.

You are not being asked to become a menstrual health expert. You are being asked to be a decent human being and a good coach. That means creating an environment where every athlete - regardless of their body, their disability, or their cycle - feels safe, supported, and able to participate.

That's not a big ask. And it makes a bigger difference than you might think.

*A little empathy goes a long way.  
And that makes you not just a coach - but a great one.*



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