



Periods + Disability

What nobody told you, but should have

DID YOU KNOW?



**ONLY
10%**

of people with disability have ever received information about managing their period while doing sport. That's less than half the rate for people without disability.

This resource exists to change that.

FIRST UP, LET'S TALK ABOUT PERIODS.

A period is part of the menstrual cycle, a monthly process where the lining of the uterus sheds if pregnancy hasn't occurred. Periods usually last between 2 and 7 days, and the cycle repeats roughly every 21 to 35 days. Every person's experience is different.

During and in the lead up to a period, a person may experience cramps, bloating, headaches, back pain, fatigue, mood changes, cravings, and anxiety - among other things. For people with disability, these experiences can be significantly more intense or complex.

HOW DISABILITY CAN AFFECT YOUR PERIOD

Disability can shape every aspect of how a period is experienced, from the physical symptoms to the products that work, the environments that feel safe, and the support that's needed. Here's what we know:

Physical disability

Fine motor difficulties, limited range of motion, reduced strength, or the inability to stand or squat can make standard period products difficult or impossible to use independently. Using a tampon or menstrual cup, for example, requires a specific set of physical actions that many people with physical disability cannot perform without pain, difficulty, or risk of injury.

People with conditions such as cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injuries, or limb differences often need adaptive products or modified techniques, and most of the time, nobody tells them what those options are.

Neurological disability and neurodivergence

For autistic people or those with ADHD, sensory sensitivities can make standard period products intolerable. The feel of a pad, the sound of a wrapper, the wetness of blood, or the sensation of an internal product can be overwhelming or genuinely unbearable.

Executive functioning challenges can also make remembering to change products, tracking cycle dates, or managing the logistics of period care in an unfamiliar environment extremely difficult. In high-sensory sporting environments, this is significantly more challenging. The noise, lighting, and people can make self-care tasks feel impossible.

Psychosocial disability

Anxiety, depression, and other psychosocial conditions can interact with the hormonal fluctuations of the menstrual cycle in ways that significantly amplify symptoms. Research shows that period-related anxiety, particularly fear of leaking, embarrassment, or not having the right products, is a major barrier to participation in sport and daily life for people with psychosocial disability.

Intellectual disability

People with intellectual disability may need additional support to understand the menstrual cycle, learn to use period products, and develop routines for self-care. Clear, visual, step-by-step guidance (rather than text-heavy or abstract information), is essential. Families and carers play a critical role, and they also need support and information to provide this care confidently and with dignity.

Conditions that affect internal anatomy

Conditions such as vaginismus, pelvic floor dysfunction, connective tissue disorders, endometriosis, adenomyosis, paraplegia, or spinal and nerve injuries can make internal period products painful, impossible, or anatomically unsuitable. Anatomical differences, including those related to amputation, can also affect how and where products sit in the body.

For people who use wheelchairs, the position of the pelvis during seated activity can significantly affect flow, leakage, and comfort in ways that standard product guidance simply does not address.





THE RESEARCH SAYS

75%

of people with disability believe their disability affects the type of period products and support they need.

37%

are unable to use standard pads or tampons at all. Yet almost no formal guidance exists to help them navigate their options.

YOUR PERIOD YOUR SPORT

Sport has well-documented physical and mental health benefits, but currently, **only 12%** of women with disability participate in sport. Menstruation is a significant contributing factor.

Research from the Powering Participation study (Hanlon, Flowers, Mesagno & Share the Dignity, 2026) found that:

67%

active participants with disability skipped sport because of their period.

37%

specifically skipped because they didn't have the period products they needed.

86-87%

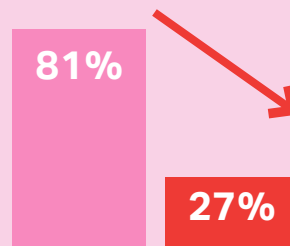
worry about leaking when participating in sport.

73-78%

feel anxious about having their period while participating in sport.

ONLY 10%

had ever received any formal guidance about managing their period in sport.



Confidence in managing periods drops dramatically outside the home. **81%** of active participants with disability felt confident managing their period at home. That drops to just **27%** at sports facilities.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE. AND IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT.

The barriers that make period management harder for people with disability are systemic. Inadequate products, inaccessible facilities, undertrained staff, and almost no formal education or support. None of that is on you.

What you deserve is honest information, practical options, and environments that actually work for your body. That's what this resource series is here to provide.

No one should be excluded from participating in sport due to menstruation.



**Content created by Tasha Lawton
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Based on Powering Participation
research: Hanlon, Flowers,
Mesagno & Share the Dignity (2026)