

MENSTRUATION AND THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE

Menstruation, or a period, is part of the menstrual cycle when a woman bleeds from her vagina for a few days. Bleeding can last around 2-7 days and is a normal part of the cycle when blood and the womb's lining is shed.



The **menstrual cycle** begins on the first day of a period, and the cycle restarts on the first day of the next one. The cycle usually lasts between 23-35 days. It can vary for every woman.

Women who use hormonal contraceptives have a slightly different menstrual cycle, and the following information may not apply. Although women who use contraceptives might experience a bleeding phase, this type is a withdrawal bleed rather than a menstrual bleed.

Phases of the menstrual cycle



Menstruation: Uterus lining sheds as menstrual blood.



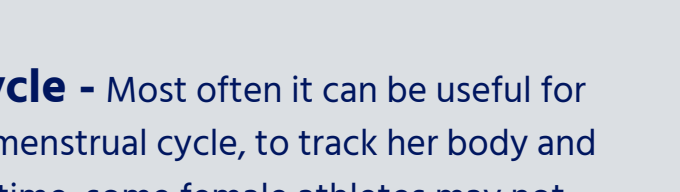
Follicular phase: The body prepares to release an egg. Estrogen increases, thickening the uterus lining. It can last 7 to 21 days.



Ovulatory phase: Ovary releases an egg that travels to the uterus. Usually around day 14, but it can vary.



Luteal phase: The body prepares for pregnancy. If no fertilisation occurs, progesterone decreases, causing the uterus lining to shed. This phase lasts 10-16 days.



Phases of the menstrual cycle - Most often it can be useful for a female athlete to understand her menstrual cycle, to track her body and optimise performance. At the same time, some female athletes may not feel that their menstrual cycle affects their performance significantly and may choose not to track it too closely.

By knowing the menstrual cycle phases, some athletes may be able to adjust their training and self-care accordingly to optimize their performance.

What is NORMAL?

A **normal cycle** can range from 21 to 35 days and remains relatively constant from month to month. If a cycle is outside this range, it may still be normal for that person, but it is best to consult a doctor to consider any medical causes.

A **normal menstrual flow** is expected to be between 30 to 80 millimeters (about 2 to 16 tablespoons) throughout the period, but this is also different for each woman.



A **normal period** lasts 2 to 7 days, but this varies from person to person. Seek medical advice if it has been more than three months since your last period.



What should athletes know about menstrual cycles?

Menstruation is a normal biological function and a reality for half of the population around the world. An athlete's menstrual cycle can often provide information about their overall state of health, including whether they're getting the appropriate nutrition, training too hard, and if their bodies are getting what they need to be as strong as possible.

Some athletes, especially those in sports emphasizing leanness, may believe that getting to a state where they're not having periods (amenorrhea) will help their performance. Amenorrhea can indicate relative energy deficiency in sport (RED-S), a syndrome of poor health and declining athletic performance when athletes do not get enough fuel through food to support the energy demands of their daily lives and training.

There are many other medical causes for loss of periods or missing periods in addition to RED-S. Therefore it is essential that any female athlete who misses 3 or more periods consults a doctor.

Benefits of tracking your menstrual cycle

Just as an athlete understands and monitors their nutrition, well-being, sleep, and hydration, understanding and tracking the impact of their menstrual cycle on their training, performance, and general health can be useful. Female athletes should be in tune with how their bodies feel and change throughout different phases of the menstrual cycle.

This can help athletes identify phases in their cycles where they may require additional recovery or benefit from altering their training. Adapting training depending on these symptoms can sometimes help the athlete feel better and improve the quality of their training or even increase the number of days they train. It should be noted, however, that training according to menstrual cycles is a topic that is still being researched.



When and where to seek help?

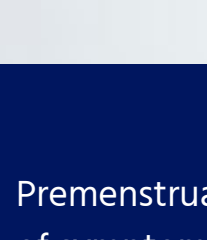
Although often there is no cause for concern, it is best to see a doctor in any of the following scenarios:



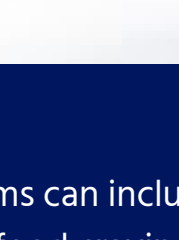
Periods have not started after the age of 15 years.



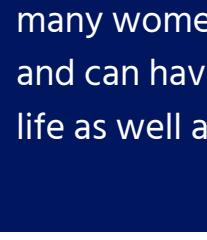
The gap between periods is less than 21 days or more than 45 days



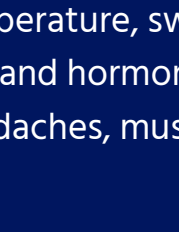
Premenstrual symptoms or period pains are severe enough to get in the way of everyday life, training, and competition performance.



You require frequent tampon/sanitary pad changes every 1-2 hours due to heavy bleeding.



You have irregular periods, i.e., you cannot predict when your next period is roughly likely to start. This can often be normal within the first few years of starting periods.

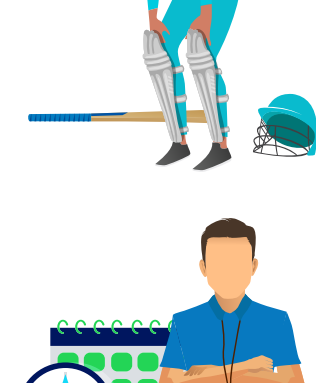


You have missed 3 or more periods, i.e., your last period was over 3 months ago.

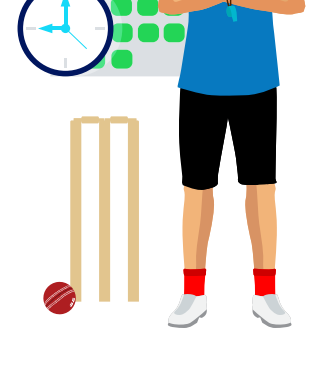
Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) is a group of symptoms that can occur in the days leading up to menstruation. PMS affects many women, including female cricketers, and can have a significant impact on their life as well as cricket performance.

The symptoms can include irritability, mood swings, anxiety, depression, food cravings, difficulty sleeping or changes in sleep patterns, difficulty concentrating or remembering things, changes in body temperature, sweating, heart rate, blood pressure, metabolism and hormone levels and breast tenderness, bloating, fatigue, headaches, muscle aches and joint pain.

Periods are normal. Athletes should talk about it!



The menstrual cycle is one of the most important biological rhythms. The hormone fluctuation affects more than just the ovaries and uterus; these influences energy levels, brain function, muscle and bone growth, metabolism, and more. These effects can have a very real impact on how female athletes feel when competing and how the body adapts to training.



For this reason, coaches may consider being more flexible in their training schedules to accommodate these changes. Teams may also consider helping athletes track their cycles if appropriate and request that this information be shared with team medical staff to help athletes and coaches better understand the individual athlete's cycle.



Finally, talking about it with teammates always helps. Fellow athletes can be very supportive and share their experiences and strategies. There is also comfort in discussing it and sharing the experience with fellow athletes.

Menstrual Products

There are a variety of menstrual products.

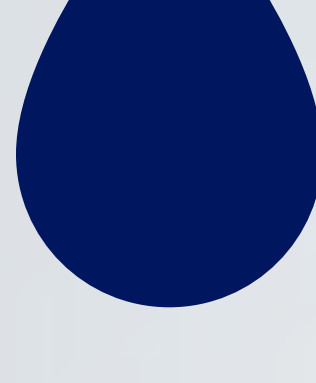
- a. Tampons:** They are inserted into the vagina to absorb menstrual blood.
- b. Cups:** They are reusable, bell-shaped devices that collect menstrual blood.
- c. Period underwear:** They are designed with built-in absorbent material.
- d. Sanitary pads:** They are made from absorbent material and attach to underwear.
- e. Discs:** They are flexible, disc-shaped devices that collect menstrual blood.



Choose products that are absorbent, comfortable, easy to use, and fit your budget.

Regularly change your products depending on your flow.

Do not use a product for more than eight hours.



Menstrual Hygiene

Menstrual hygiene refers to the practices and measures to ensure cleanliness and comfort during menstruation.

Maintaining menstrual hygiene is crucial for your well-being and performance. Neglecting it can sometimes lead to infections and menstrual issues.

To stay on top of it, keep these practical tips in mind:

Track your menstrual cycle and stock up on menstrual hygiene products in advance.

Change your product every 4-8 hours or more frequently for heavy flow.



1

2

3

4

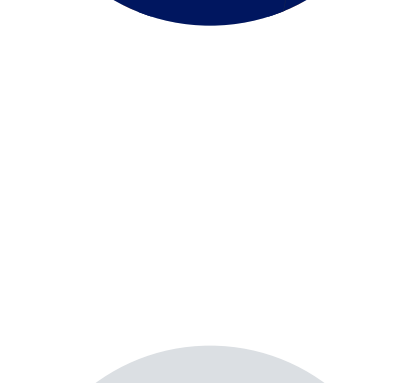
5

Choose the right product that suits your needs and preferences.

Prioritize hand hygiene by washing your hands before and after changing your product.

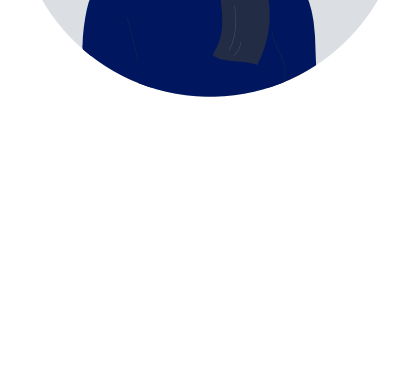
Don't hesitate to seek help when needed. If you're facing challenges while traveling, reach out to your coach, doctor, or a trusted adult.

Myths about periods and sports



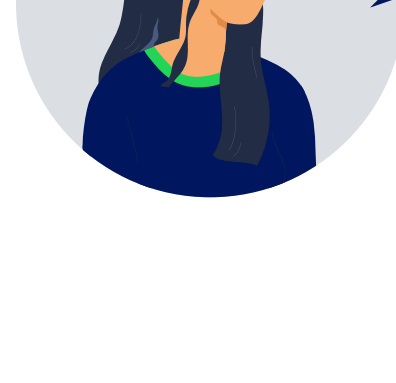
Myth: Physical activity during menstruation is harmful or should be avoided.

Reality: Engaging in physical activity during menstruation is generally safe and beneficial. Exercise can help alleviate menstrual symptoms, improve mood, and promote well-being. It is important to listen to your body, adjust the intensity as needed, and choose comfortable menstrual products.



Myth: Menstruation negatively affects athletic performance.

Reality: While some individuals may experience fluctuations in energy levels or performance during their menstrual cycle, the impact varies from person to person. Many athletes continue to perform at a high-level during menstruation, and there is no definitive evidence that menstrual bleeding directly impairs athletic performance.



Myth: Women cannot participate in sports or physical activities during their periods.

Reality: Women and girls can and should participate in sports and physical activities throughout their menstrual cycle. Staying active promotes physical health, mental well-being, and self-confidence. Using appropriate menstrual products and managing symptoms can help women engage in sports comfortably.

