

Balanced Female Health

A RESOURCE FOR ADULTS SUPPORTING
YOUNG PEOPLE IN COMMUNITY SPORT



In collaboration with

ACC SportSmart



NetballSmart

Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

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The New Zealand Government's Women and Girls in Sport and Active Recreation **Strategy** supports more women and girls to be physically active through sport and recreation. Sport New Zealand's Women and Girls **Action Plan** - Our Roadmap to 2024 has a focus on partnering with relevant organisations to develop and share resources that showcase good practice for supporting women and girls.

The **Balance is Better** philosophy is about creating quality experiences for all young people to keep them active and involved in sport. Sport NZ recognises that the needs of young women in community sport are unique.

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Introduction



Introduction

About this resource

Developed by health professionals working in the sport sector, this resource provides information and practical tips on topics such as changes throughout female puberty, the menstrual cycle, and factors that impact young people's physical and mental wellbeing.

While many people who menstruate identify as a girl, woman or female, not everyone does. Some people who menstruate are trans men, non-binary or intersex.

We have endeavored to use non-gendered terms throughout the resource. However, some sections are specific to female physiology or research.

We recognise that young people in Aotearoa New Zealand are not all the same, and some groups of young people may require different considerations, culturally, physically and emotionally.

Sport NZ acknowledges the pioneering work of Netball New Zealand and NetballSmart with funding from ACC, in the development of the NetballSmart SmartHealth resource. Sport NZ has worked in collaboration with all parties in producing this handbook.



Introduction

Who is this resource for?

Balanced Female Health is designed to support coaches, instructors, and parents to understand the health and development of young people who are physically active through community sport in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This resource will help you to:

- understand what defines balanced female health in community sport
- strengthen your knowledge and understanding of female-specific development throughout puberty and adolescence
- understand the importance of the menstrual cycle for health and performance, both mentally and physically
- gain practical tips to support balanced health, reduce the risk of illness and injury, and raise awareness of female-specific health issues
- strengthen your knowledge and understanding of nutrition and recovery principles that support energy demands during participation in sport
- gain awareness on how to best support mental wellbeing in sport
- learn skills to identify at-risk individuals and provide practical tips and resources to support those requiring further assistance.

Understanding balanced health



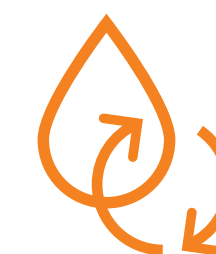
Understanding balanced health

What does balanced health look like?

A young person with balanced health:



balances training with recovery



has a healthy and regular menstrual cycle



gets 8+ hours of sleep



rarely has injuries or illness



fuels adequately to maintain energy



has time for hobbies, relaxation and social connection

Each of these topics will be covered in more detail throughout this resource.

Understanding balanced health

Female-specific needs in sport

Historically, research in sport science has been conducted on male athletes and the findings were applied to female athletes for many years. Current and future research looks to understand the unique female needs in sport and physical activity.

Key differences in females that affect health and wellbeing:

- Females are unique because of their menstrual cycle and the hormones that are produced. The menstrual cycle is an important indicator of health.
- Females change (and move) differently during puberty and need to be supported during this time of life.
- Females have different injury risks and challenges, particularly with bone health and major ligament injuries (ACL).
- Females respond differently than males socially and emotionally in and out of sport, which affects ongoing engagement in physical activity.



Consider this

Understanding female health is critical to being able to respond to the needs of young women and provide support for them to be physically active in a way that promotes their health and wellbeing.

Understanding balanced health

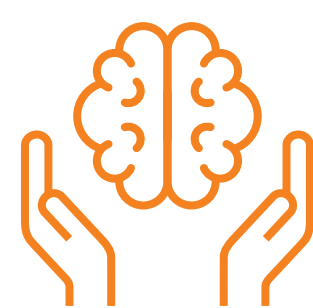
Benefits when there is balance in sport

Within the right environment, participation in sport has positive effects on physical, mental and social wellbeing.



Benefits for physical wellbeing

- Increased neuromuscular, cardiovascular and respiratory function
- Improved immune system
- Improved metabolism
- Optimal bone health
- Prevention of chronic disease



Benefits for mental wellbeing

- Increased self esteem and body confidence
- Improved mood and concentration
- Improved sleep quality and duration
- Reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression



Benefits for social wellbeing

- Improved communication and relationships
- Promotes collaboration
- Helps to develop a sense of belonging
- Helps to build resilience and leadership qualities



Consider this

By helping young people understand the positive benefits of participating in physical activity, you can ensure they have positive sporting experiences, and are supported to be physically active for life.

Puberty and development

Puberty and development

Understanding puberty

Puberty marks a time of transition and transformation from childhood to adulthood, known as adolescence.

During adolescence young people are building a body that is more physically and mentally capable than ever.

Navigating puberty, and learning to adapt to changes within their bodies, may alter the experience of and performance in sport, particularly in females.

Research shows that young women want to be active and they understand why physical activity is important for their health.

However, during puberty and adolescence, they experience a complex range of personal and social factors in their lives that influence their involvement in sport and exercise.

In New Zealand, there is a drop-off in participation and engagement during puberty, more so in young women aged 12-17.



Consider this

It is important to encourage and support young people to maintain participation in physical activity in ways that work best for them. Create safe spaces for young people to have conversations about their health and wellbeing and to share their experiences and learn from each other.



Puberty and development

Understanding mental wellbeing

Adolescence and early adulthood are key phases during which mental illness and mental health issues can develop.

When working with young people in community sport as coaches, instructors, or parents, it is important to build your understanding of how you can support young people's mental wellbeing.

Understand the conversations that young people may have with themselves such as 'people judge me', 'I don't belong', or 'it's hopeless'.

Research has shown that building five actions into day-to-day lives is important for the wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities.

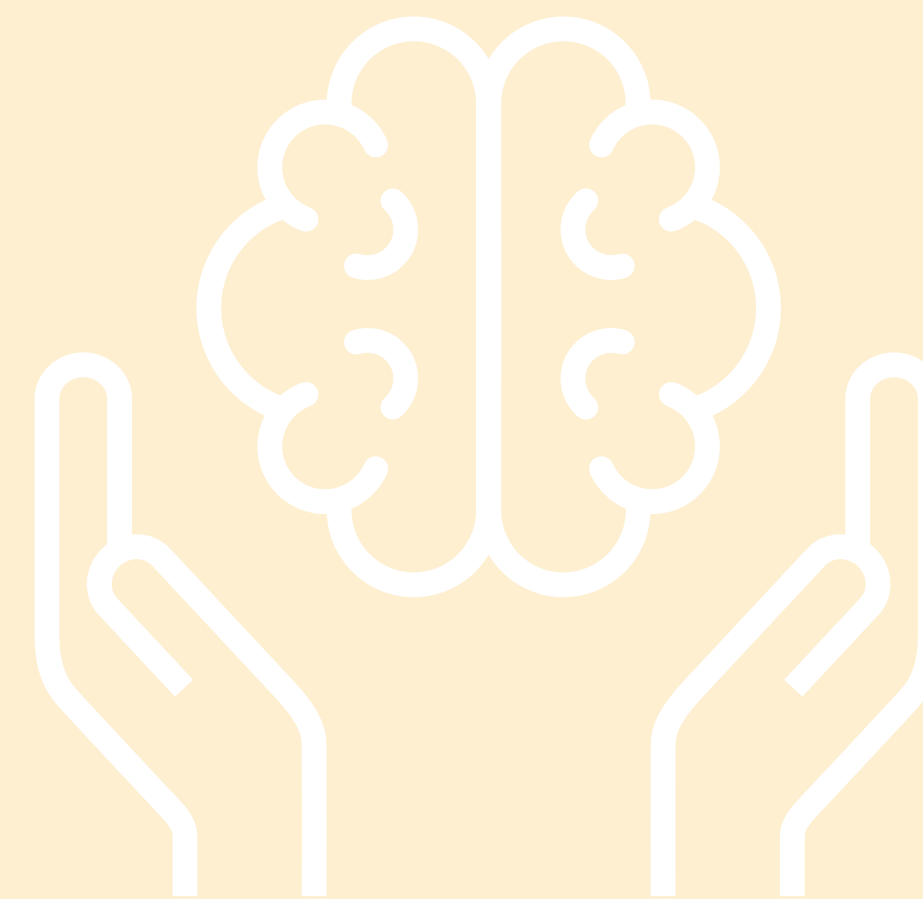
- Connect, me whakawhanaunga
- Give, tukua
- Take notice, me aro tonu
- Keep learning, me ako tonu
- Be active, me kori tonu



Learn more [Five Ways to Wellbeing | Mental Health Foundation](#)

Puberty and development

Supporting mental wellbeing



As coaches, instructors or parents you can:

Encourage young people to know when they need help

Help them to develop self awareness of their own needs. Advise them to seek help when they are experiencing challenges to their wellbeing.

Know that everyone has bad days

It is common for moods to go up and down. Make bad days and challenges part of “normal” life. If low mood persists, encourage them to be brave and meet with a support person to discuss their feelings and develop practical strategies.

Identify their support people

Encourage and support young people to have key people in their lives whom they trust to discuss their health and wellbeing with. This may be friends, whānau, teachers, instructors or coaches, or yourself.

Acknowledge that it's OK to not be OK

Mental wellbeing matters and seeking help and support is a sign of strength and courage. Encourage young people to be proactive in seeking medical advice as they would for illness or injury.

Encourage good sleep and recovery habits

Good sleep is vital for young people. Lack of sleep is one of the greatest contributors to poor mental state/health. Encourage at least one day of rest from hard physical activity per week.

Support them to be active in ways that benefit their mental wellbeing

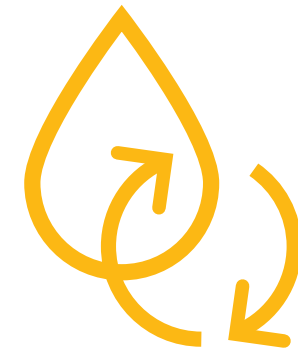
Take time to understand their motivations, wants, concerns and fears and whether their current activities support their wellbeing or add more worries and pressures to their lives.

Puberty and development

Understanding body changes



The brain signals the start of puberty by producing female sex hormones.



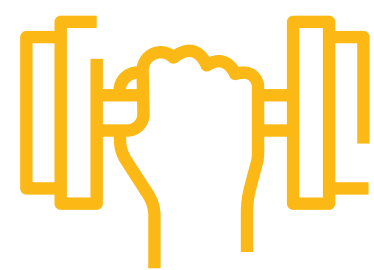
Periods (menses) start between 8-16 years. In New Zealand, the average age is 13 years old.



The rate of growth and development is the highest during puberty. The growth spurt between 10-15 years old means adolescent females will grow on average 5-7.5cm over 1-2 years.



Hormones stimulate breast budding (8-13 years), pubic and armpit hair, sweating, acne, and the onset of periods (8-16 years).



Puberty is the key time for bones to strengthen. Female hormones aid this bone strength. Muscles and tendons lengthen toward adult levels.



Females have unique body shape changes. Hips widen, breasts develop, and body fat increases. It is a complex time for body image and self-confidence.



Did you know?

During puberty, the musculoskeletal and reproductive systems develop and mature. The same changes happen to everyone, they just happen at different rates.

Puberty and development

Understanding movement and performance changes

During puberty, rapid upward growth (the growth spurt) and altered body shape challenges the co-ordination of young people. Young people may experience changes to:

- Running and landing mechanics
- Co-ordination and reaction times
- Strength and movement control

This is because the brain takes time to catch up with the physical changes and improve participant skill development. Challenges to physical capabilities may affect females more so than males due to strength differences (from testosterone) that support changes to body shape and movement control.

Puberty can temporarily affect performance in sport. This is more prevalent in females and can be a time of confusion and frustration for the young person, as well as coaches, instructors, and parents.



Puberty and development

Supporting physical wellbeing



As coaches, instructors or parents you can:

Normalise conversations about female body changes and development

Coaches, instructors or parents (and especially males) don't have to be passive when learning about or engaging in conversations about puberty and development. Encourage open communication and use of support people if young people need to talk.

Create environments where young people can feel safe, happy, confident and valued

Most young women have had an adult comment on their appearance or physical suitability for an activity at some stage in their life.

Provide young people with positive messages on body image.

Focus on long-term development

For coaches, this means focusing on developing the fundamentals of movement and enhancing skill development. It is vital to avoid overloading a young musculoskeletal system throughout the stages of growth and development as this increases the risk of injury and ill-health.



Did you know?

The grow spurt occurs quicker in females than males but, as their bones grow longer, they don't necessarily grow stronger at the same rate.

Puberty and development

Understanding emotional and social influence changes

Young women may choose to participate in sport or be physically active less frequently during adolescence for a range of diverse reasons.

Changes to participation can be due to:

- Being busy, too tired or lacking motivation for physical activity
- Feeling unsupported or unsafe in their environments
- Altered confidence around physical capabilities
- Changes to body image and body confidence
- Perceived social judgement or acceptance
- Changes within social groups and friends who engage in sport and active recreation
- Feelings that activities are less fun or too focussed on performance



Puberty and development

Supporting social wellbeing



As coaches, instructors or parents you can:

Be an ally or an advocate

Support young people to feel empowered about having a conversation about their bodies. As key adult influencers, you have an important responsibility to role model what 'healthy conversations' look, feel and sound like. Open up the space to have the chat and help to guide young people through this important transition period.

Support young people to make smart choices

Understand that young people are not mini-adults, rather individuals who are cognitively, physically, and socially developing. Young people cannot do everything adults can do so ensuring sport opportunities are developmentally appropriate is critical.

Encourage and foster positive peer relationships and team culture

During adolescence (around 13-19yrs) peers and role models are likely to influence adolescents the most and young people at this stage are likely to be pre-occupied with how they appear to others.

Ensure physical activity remains fun and sociable.



Consider this

Encourage downtime outside of sport and support other hobbies, relaxation and social/family connections. Time away from sport helps with recovery and maintains enjoyment and enthusiasm.

The menstrual cycle

The menstrual cycle

Understanding the menstrual cycle

The menstrual cycle should occur regularly (every 21-35 days) and is an important measure of health – like a monthly report card.

The menstrual cycle can give insights into the ability to cope with the multiple aspects of a person's life, including fuelling, training load and recovery.

Symptoms in and around the period such as blood loss, abdominal cramps or pre-menstrual symptoms should not stop enjoyment of or engagement in school, work, social or physical activity.

Changes to the menstrual cycle such as irregular or absent periods, or heavy or painful bleeding, may indicate that the body is under stress with an imbalance between the physical and psychological demands.

Key Terms

Menstruation (The Period):

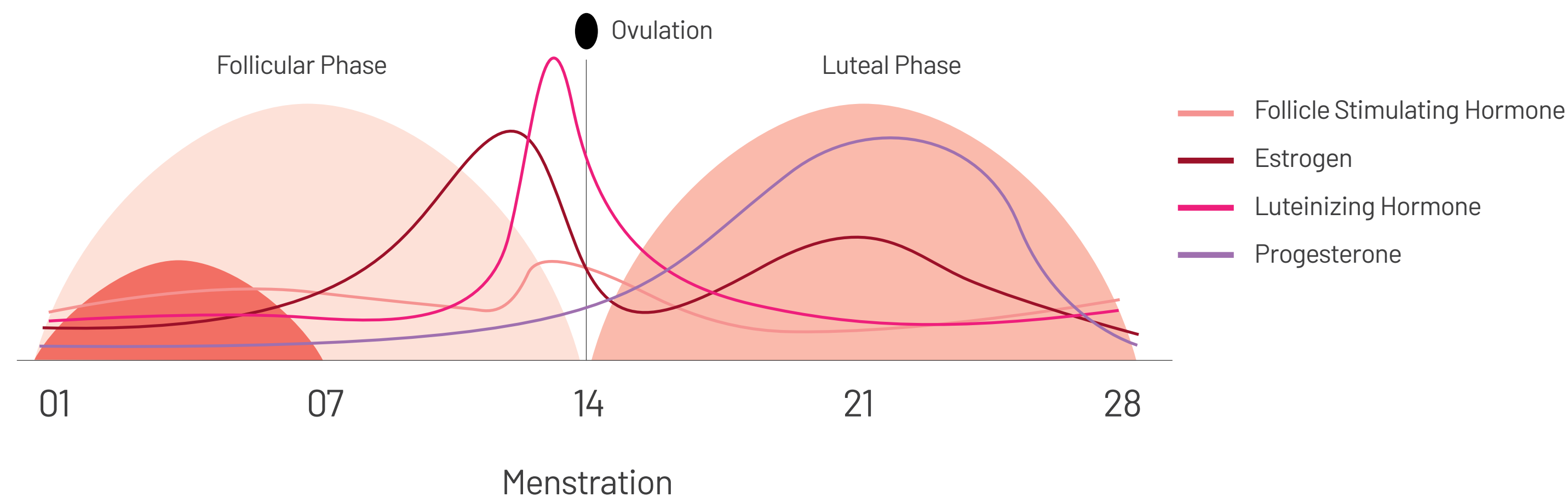
The average period (days bleeding) lasts 3-7 days.

Ovulation:

Ovulation is the main event of the menstrual cycle, as it produces the female sex hormones (around day 12-14).


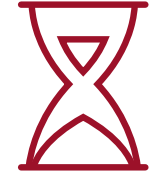




Hormones:

The two key hormones made are Oestrogen (Estradiol) and Progesterone. They support and influence many body systems and are vital for female health.



The menstrual cycle

What is a healthy menstrual cycle?

	Healthy	
	Age	Average age of first period is 8-16 years.
	Length of period	Average length is 3-7 days.
	Length of cycle	Average length is 28 days but can be between 21-35 days. (From Day 1 of one cycle to Day 1 of the next cycle)
	Blood Loss	Average 2-4 tbsp (30-60ml). Changes to period products 3-4 hourly.
	Pain	Abdominal cramps, pelvis and low back pain are normal. However, they should not limit everyday life.
	Pre-menstrual symptoms (PMS)	Before your period, lower back pain, abdominal cramps, bloating, fatigue, mood changes and food cravings are common.

When to see a Doctor



Delayed onset of the first period. A GP consultation is recommended if there no sign of the first period at 15 years of age.

Bleeding that lasts longer than 7 days.

Irregular (longer than 35 days), frequent (shorter than 21 days) or absent periods.

Heavy bleeding, leaking and large clots requiring very regular changes to period products. This can lead to low iron stores or may be a sign of underlying issues.

Symptoms which are not managed with over-the-counter medication and / or interfere with daily life.

Symptoms (such as major mood changes, fatigue, excess pain) which interfere with daily life should be assessed.



The menstrual cycle

Exercising during the period

Physical activity during the period is safe and the body can perform well.

Female physiology is amazing. The female hormones oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone support physical activity and health.

During the period, due to low hormone levels, muscles recover well from physical activity. There may be an experience of increased strength, speed and power.

Exercise and movement can help ease the mental and physical symptoms experienced in and around the period, such as low mood, abdominal cramps and low back pain.

In the days before the period, mood changes may occur due to falling hormone levels (progesterone). Once the period begins and hormones are more even, there may be a time of calm and better moods.

The menstrual cycle

Changes to the menstrual cycle

Menstrual cycle variability refers to changes in the length between cycles, as well as changes in the frequency or amount of blood loss. Exercise alone should not cause irregular or absent menstrual cycles.

Some factors that can cause changes to the menstrual cycle are:

Stress and imbalance between load and recovery

The menstrual cycle can be affected by emotional/social stress.

Birth control

Many types of hormonal contraception affect the menstrual cycle, often preventing ovulation. The introduction of, and / or stopping hormonal contraception result in changes to (ovulatory) cycles. If after stopping hormonal contraception, the menstrual cycle does not regulate, an assessment by a GP is recommended.

Under-fuelling and under-recovery

These are common causes of irregular or absent menstrual cycles as hormone production is altered.

Pregnancy

The phases during and after pregnancy, whilst breast feeding, or with a miscarriage can cause variability or absence of the menstrual cycle.

Age

When the onset of the period (menses) first begins, the menstrual cycle can be somewhat irregular. This may occur for 1-3 years.

Other

Common causes of menstrual cycle variability are long distance travel, sleep disorders, shift work, medications or medical reasons.

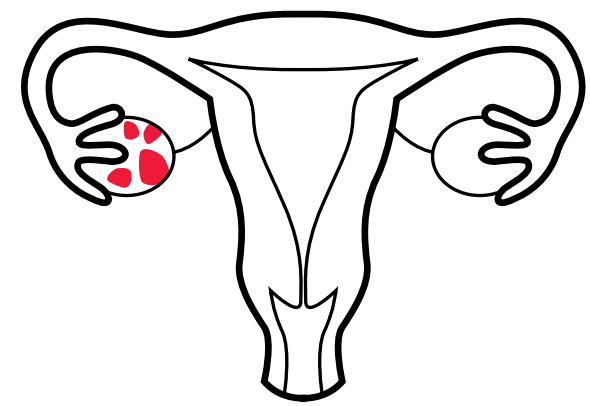


Did you know?

Not having a period is not normal, even with hard exercise. Absence of the menstrual cycle can impact on bone health and injury risk due to the altered production of many important health hormones.

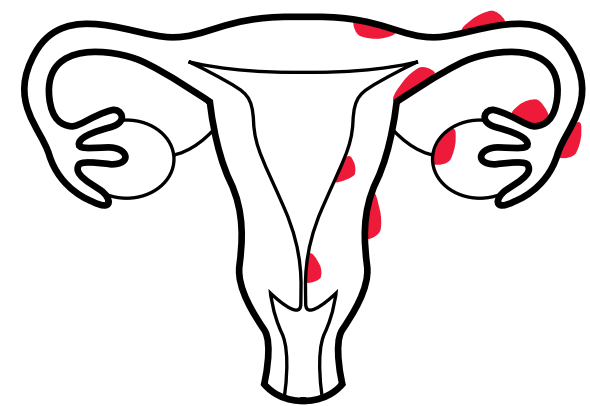
The menstrual cycle

Other causes of menstrual cycle variability



Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)

- Presents in 6-20% of females.
- It is a hormonal condition characterised by an absence of ovulation and high levels of male hormones.
- Symptoms include irregular periods (late or many days of bleeding), excess facial or body hair, acne, hair loss, weight gain.
- Commonly misdiagnosed or undiagnosed for many years.



Endometriosis

- Presents in 10% of females and can take many years to diagnose.
- It is an inflammatory condition with immune system involvement.
- Occurs when cells from inside the uterus (endometrium) grow abnormally outside of the uterus.
- The main symptom is pain (often severe) which may be present between periods and may include nausea and vomiting.
- Other symptoms include bowel and bladder problems, digestive system issues including abdominal bloating, bleeding between periods, headaches and low-grade fevers.



When to see a Doctor

There may be other causes of menstrual cycle abnormalities.

If a young female is experiencing any of the menstrual cycle related symptoms noted, or other symptoms which alter quality of life and participation in physical activity, please encourage a medical assessment.

The menstrual cycle

Supporting a healthy menstrual cycle

As coaches, instructors, or parents you can:

Encourage overall balance in the lives of young people

This includes proper sleep, recovery, a mix of activities and connections (both social and emotional) and proper fuelling and hydration before and after physical activity. Encourage young people to eat a wide variety of nutrient dense meals, from all food groups. This optimises health and helps to support a regular menstrual cycle.

Encourage individuals to learn about their bodies

Encourage individuals to track their menstrual cycle. Monitoring their individual symptoms throughout the menstrual cycle and the ways in which it affects their physical activity supports a greater understanding and facilitates a menstrual “prehab” approach. Use this awareness to help with planning, preparation and performance in their chosen activities.

Provide positive messages around menstruation

Have a variety of period products available at school, home and in recreational facilities or environments. A group or team period kit can be a great way to start a conversation.

Support pubertal change

Support pubertal change with open communication about menstrual cycle related issues. Encourage the advice and support from a registered medical professional where necessary.

Provide open communication

Provide open communication around how they are feeling and their ability to exercise with menstrual cycle related concerns. Encourage young people to seek medical advice if their menstrual cycle is interfering with their daily life, sport or chosen form of exercise.



Consider this

Everyone experiences their menstrual cycle differently. Support decision making around young people’s individual experiences and symptoms.

Maintaining energy in sport

Maintaining energy in sport

Understanding energy demands of young people

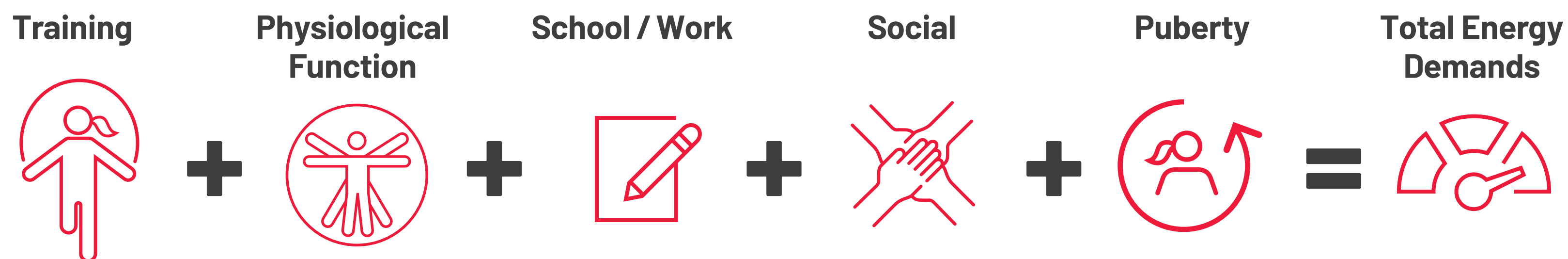
The human body requires energy (nutrition and recovery) to support all the key body systems.

Energy demands naturally increase during puberty and adolescence due to the increased requirements for growth and development.

During this time, it is important to support a higher food intake.

It is important for young people to eat nutrient dense foods from a variety of food groups, including fruit and vegetables. Additional calcium (to support bone growth and strength) and iron (to support menstruation and lean muscle mass) may be required.

Additionally, puberty usually coincides with a time of high energy output of young people who may be involved in multiple sports or physical activities, increasing academic work, part-time jobs and social interactions. Therefore, young people need to fuel for the total energy demands of their lives.



Consider this

Encourage young people to get 8+ hours sleep per night to reduce the risk of illness and injury and aid recovery. Sleep also plays a major part in mental wellbeing. Monitor the number of early morning (or late) sessions or activities which impact sleep duration.

Maintaining energy in sport

When to fuel throughout the day

Overnight, the body uses energy for many body processes including growth and development and adaptation to training or exercise. We wake in a small energy deficit every day.

Our energy requirements increase as soon as we wake up, so fuelling should occur early in the day to help restore this morning energy deficit.

Sport can further increase energy deficits if not supported well through appropriate fuelling, so it's important to fuel both before and after physical activity. Timing matters for both performance and recovery.



Consider this

Encourage young people to eat a balanced breakfast and before and after physical activity to support their energy needs throughout the day.

Maintaining energy in sport

What happens when energy needs are not met?

Meeting energy demands can be a challenge for young people. When there is insufficient energy available to fuel the body systems and energy demands it's called Low Energy Availability (LEA). This can occur due to under-fuelling or under-recovery.

Under-fuelling

can be caused by:

- Lack of awareness of the fuel required to meet total energy demands.
- Inadequate planning for the daily activities.
- Poor food preparation.
- Lack of time to consume adequate energy (e.g., little or no food before early morning sessions).
- Purposefully restricting the amount of food eaten or food groups within the diet.
- Reducing the frequency of meals / snacks.
- Fuelling based on a reward system of activity performed.

Under-recovery

can be caused by:

- Over-scheduling of sport and other extra-curricular activities.
- Lack of awareness of the demands of other non-exercise related activity (e.g., study, part-time jobs).
- Over-exercising (e.g., adding additional sessions).
- Reduced sleep duration (e.g., early morning sessions).
- Not taking rest days or adding in other physical activity on rest days.



Consider this

Look at young people's weekly schedules and ensure there is time to adapt (to exercise), repair muscle and recover. Encourage at least one day of rest from hard physical activity per week.

Maintaining energy in sport

Supporting young people to maintain energy

Plan and prepare

Encourage and assist young people to prepare the fuel they require around their schedule. They may need additional food for school, for travel to and from activities, and pre / post exercise.

Advocate and take action

Ensure young people have balanced lives within sport and other physical activities. Acknowledge when you don't understand something and practice being a supportive ally. It is important that young people see adults talking about and responding to female health issues in supportive and inclusive ways.

Monitor load and wellbeing

Monitor the workload of young people (volume and intensity) as well as the demands of a busy schedule (school, work etc.). Watch for signs of low energy (fatigue, demotivation, recurrent injury or illness, mood changes).

Have courageous conversations

Have conversations with young people's parents, coaches, leaders and teachers if they show signs of low energy, female health related issues, injury or poor health. It can be difficult to understand someone's experience when you have not been through it yourself. But it is better to have a conversation and accept that there will be moments where you feel uncomfortable than to avoid it.



Consider this

Support overall balance in young people's lives. This includes sleep, recovery, a mix of activities and social and emotional connections.

Focus on listening to young people and understanding their unique needs.

Supporting balanced health

Supporting balanced health

What does imbalanced health look like?

A young person with imbalanced health:



has prolonged tiredness and fatigue



has an irregular or absent menstrual cycle



often gets inadequate sleep (less than 8 hours)



has recurring injuries or illness



may have irritability or mood changes



doesn't make time for physical activity, hobbies or social connection

Consider this

If you notice any of these signs and symptoms of imbalanced health, talking to young people about it is the most important thing you can do. When approaching these conversations, be mindful of what else is happening in their lives and make listening and learning your focus.



Supporting balanced health

When there is a lack of balance in sport

If the right balance isn't achieved in sport, there are potential risks to the overall health and wellbeing of young people.

Risks to physical wellbeing



- injury and illness
- menstrual cycle related issues
- overtraining or under-recovery
- unhealthy nutritional practices

Risks to mental wellbeing



- long term injury
- under-performance pressure and expectation
- burnout
- development of concerning behaviour e.g., withdrawal, avoidance, anger

Risks to social wellbeing



- unsupportive environments
- controlling practices or environments
- bullying, harassment, and discrimination
- hazing, abuse, conflict, and isolation

Did you know?



Stress fractures can occur in the feet, shins, back and ribs. It may be a sign that there are underlying issues affecting bone health which need assessment.

Consider this



Adults need to proactively monitor and manage the workload (intensity and volume) of motivated young people to mitigate risks of over-training and overloading.

Did you know?



Ongoing fatigue should not be an accepted consequence of playing sport or being physically active. It may be a sign of over-training, under-fuelling, under-recovery or a combination.

Supporting balanced health

Who is at risk of imbalanced health?

Young people at risk of imbalanced health are often individuals who:

- are involved in early specialisation - usually in one sport. There is greater risk in activities with an aesthetic or weight restricted focus e.g., gymnastics, ballet.
- participate in multiple sports and activities, with over-scheduling of commitments.
- have multiple life stressors e.g., physical activity demands, family stress, academic pressure, relationship conflict.
- exhibit perfectionist tendencies. They tend to be high achievers in multiple areas of life.
- move to higher level programs or training groups. The number of hours and intensity often increase.
- have previous injuries (especially bone stress injury) and recurrent illnesses e.g., coughs and colds.
- have engaged in disordered eating practices such as restricted eating, avoiding food groups, reward eating.
- demonstrate disordered training practices e.g., over-training, skipping rest days or signs of exercise addiction.



Consider this

Support young people to participate in a variety of sports and activities to build a wide set of skills and avoid the risks associated with early specialisation, such as overuse injury. Injury and illness may mean lost time to sport and other physical activities, which can in turn impact mental wellbeing.

Supporting balanced health

How to assess balanced health

As coaches, instructors, or parents you can ask these questions to assess overall balance and better understand a young person's health and wellbeing.

Training



- Are they enjoying participating in their sport or physical activity?
- Are they motivated to attend and / or compete?
- Is their activity balanced and are all elements covered? i.e., strength, core, fitness, fun.

Nutrition



- How are they eating to support their physical activity?
- Do they avoid meals or specific food groups?
- Do they have energy throughout training and games?
- Can they recover between activities?

Menstrual Cycle



- Are they experiencing regular menstrual cycles?
- Are they taking a hormonal contraception which may mask issues of the menstrual cycle?

Sleep



- Are they getting 8+ hours of sleep per night?
- Do they feel fatigued or not recovered?
- Do they have at least one rest day per week?

Support



- Do they have a good support network?
- Do they have a trusted adult who they can talk to if needed?

Social Connection



- Are they connecting with friends and social groups?
- Are they feeling any pressures around participating in sport or other physical activities e.g., body image, playing with friends, loss of fun?

Injury / Illness



- Have they been regularly injured or unwell?
- Is there a history of bone injury e.g., shin splints, stress reaction or stress fracture?
- Do they have a prolonged injury affecting participation and / or wellbeing?

Other Interests



- Are they engaging in social activities and down time away from sport or physical activity?
- Do they come back motivated and engaged?

Supporting balanced health

If you identify signs of imbalanced health

Starting a conversation with a young person about their health and wellbeing can sometimes feel difficult, but one courageous conversation may resolve ongoing issues or prevent health and wellbeing challenges in the future.

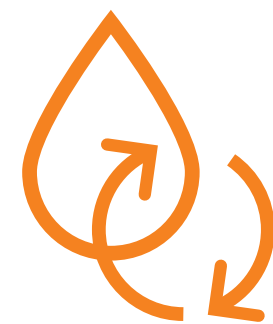
Following a conversation with a young person and/or others in their support network, there are other external support networks you can reach out to if you identify signs of imbalanced health.

Timely assessment and interventions from appropriate health professionals can prevent long term health consequences, reduce lost time to sport or physical activity through injury and illness and improve physical performance and maintain engagement in exercise.



**Low Energy Availability,
Gastro-intestinal issues,
Disordered eating**

GP, Nutritionist, Dietician



**Menstrual
Dysfunction**

GP, Endocrinologist,
Sports Physician



**Mental Health,
Mood disorders**

Psychologist, Counsellor,
Nutritionist, Dietician



**Recurrent Injury, Illness,
Performance**

GP, Physiotherapist,
Sports Physician



Consider this

Encourage Physiotherapy and /or GP support for injury and illness. Be involved in young people's plan for a healthy return to sport.

Supporting balanced health

Top 5 takeaways



Acknowledge that puberty is a transition period

Be supportive of the **physiological, emotional and social changes** that occur during this time.

Acknowledge, support, and help them **develop their strengths**.

Help to **instil positive attitudes** and self confidence in young people through sport and physical activity.



Advocate for balance

Encourage young people to maintain balance in their lives.

Facilitate **open and honest conversations** with other support networks (eg coaches, instructors, parents) about a balanced life within sport.

Support balanced health and wellbeing to reduce the risk of illness and injury.

Stay informed about female-specific health issues or wellbeing concerns.



Look beyond results to measure success

Focus on young people's enjoyment of sport and physical activity rather than results as a measure of success.

Remember – a very small proportion of young people will become elite athletes, so encourage them to try a **variety of sports and activities** to see which ones they like best.



Focus on creating positive relationships and safe environments

Develop and facilitate positive relationships with young people.

Be proactive about building trust with young people.

Create environments which are **safe, inclusive and supportive**.



Know that you have a key role to play

Have courageous conversations which enable young people to learn and thrive.

Put young people and their health and wellbeing first.

If you are concerned about the health or wellbeing, make decisions and **take action to reduce load or stress**.

Resources

Resources

Learn more

Going with the flow: Menstruation and rainbow inclusive practices in the outdoors

[This resource](#) by Education Outdoors New Zealand aims to increase gender equity and menstruation inclusiveness in the outdoors.

Learn more about:

- cultural perceptions and practices of menstruation,
- rainbow communities experiences in the outdoors,
- practical tips and information on how people can manage their periods in the outdoors, and
- how to create safe and inclusive environments to have conversations

Sport NZ philosophies, research and initiatives

- [Balance is Better](#) – The Home of Youth Sport in New Zealand
- [Young Women Profile, 2021](#), Sport New Zealand
- [#ItsMyMove Campaign](#) – Supporting young women to be active their way

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For more information, refer to:
sportnz.org.nz/balanced-female-health

