

# MENSTRUATION & SPORTS

## What Every Female Athlete Should Know

*Your period isn't your weakness — understand your cycle, train smart, and perform at your best!*

### WHY WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT IT?

Menstruation is often treated as a taboo topic in sport, but understanding your cycle can help improve performance, recovery, and overall wellbeing. Talking about periods with your coach, physio, or trainer may feel uncomfortable at first, but it makes it easier to work together and adjust training when needed.

### PHASES OF THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE

The menstrual cycle consists of three main phases, each marked by hormonal changes that may affect performance differently (though not everyone experiences noticeable effects):

- **FOLLICULAR PHASE (DAY 1–14)** – starts with bleeding; estrogen levels rise. Some athletes feel stronger or more energetic.
- **OVULATION (AROUND DAY 14)** – hormone levels peak; some may feel powerful, others more tired.
- **LUTEAL PHASE (DAY 15–28)** – progesterone rises; some experience fatigue, bloating, mood swings, or higher injury risk.

⚠️ Keep a period diary noting bleeding, mood, energy, fatigue, and performance. Identifying patterns can help you adapt your training and competition schedule.

### TRACKING YOUR CYCLE TO BOOST PERFORMANCE

Tracking your menstrual cycle can help athletes and coaches:

- Adjust training loads and intensity
- Optimize nutrition at different phases
- Better understand mood, energy, and recovery patterns

*Apps or diaries can be used to track symptoms.*

#### EXAMPLE:

Nisha, an 18-year-old kayaker, experienced low mood and poor performance 5 days before her period. By tracking her cycle, she learned to anticipate these days, manage her emotions, and compete at her best.

### PERIODS DON'T MAKE YOU WEAKER

Many athletes think periods reduce strength or speed — but research shows otherwise.

- A 2023 study found no significant decrease in strength, speed, or agility during menstruation.
- Some elite athletes even perform at their best while on their period — e.g., Chinese swimmer Fu Yuanhui competed strongly during the 2016 Olympics while menstruating.

⚠️ Don't assume your period will slow you down. Listen to your body — everyone's experience is different.

More info here



international  
canoe  
federation



### MISSING PERIODS IS NOT NORMAL

- Most menstrual cycles last 21–35 days (average 28).
- Irregular or missing periods (amenorrhea) often happen due to low energy availability — not eating enough to support both training and menstrual function.
- Long-term amenorrhea can lead to weakened bones, stress fractures, and hormonal issues.

**If your period becomes irregular or disappears, see a doctor and talk to your coach.**

### HYDRATION & NUTRITION MATTER

- Body temperature is often higher during the luteal phase, which may increase sweating and fluid needs.
- Iron is crucial, especially for athletes with heavy periods. Low iron can cause fatigue and poor performance.
- Eat iron-rich foods: red meat, beans, spinach.
- Ask your doctor for a blood test if you feel persistently tired.
- Stay well hydrated throughout your cycle.

### PERIOD PRODUCTS WON'T HOLD YOU BACK

From tampons to menstrual cups to period-proof underwear, there are more options than ever for athletes.

- One study found that menstrual cups can be a great option for athletes, as they hold more fluid, reduce leakage, and last longer than tampons.
- If you worry about leaks, try using a menstrual cup or tampon with period-proof shorts for extra confidence.

Experiment to find what works best for your sport and comfort.



### KEY TAKEAWAYS

Periods are normal, not a weakness.

Track your cycle to understand patterns and boost performance.

Missing periods is a warning sign — get medical advice early.

Nutrition and hydration are vital for menstrual health.

The right period products can keep you comfortable and confident in training and competition.