

Autism and Periods



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What is Menstruation?

Menstruation, also known as getting your 'period,' is a natural and recurring event that most born females experience for a significant portion of their lives. During this phase of the menstrual cycle there is bleeding from the vagina, which typically lasts for about 2-7 days. This process is entirely normal and does not indicate any injury or harm to the body.

The menstrual cycle varies among individuals. Most periods occur approximately every 28 days, although it's common for this interval to range from every 21 to 40 days. Each month, the length of an individual's menstrual cycle can fluctuate, with some people finding their cycles more predictable than others.



Typically, individuals will have their first period during late childhood or early teenage years. Menstruation usually occurs for the first time around the age of 12, although it can happen anytime between the ages of 10 and 15, sometimes even earlier or later! It's important to note that every girl's body follows its unique schedule regarding the onset of menstruation. Ultimately, the menstrual journey continues until the late forties or early fifties, when they reach a phase known as menopause.

Autism and Menstruation

Autistic individuals, like their neurotypical peers, experience menstruation as a natural part of life. However, research suggests that they may encounter unique challenges during this period. Understanding and addressing these challenges is crucial for providing the necessary support and accommodations.



Sensory Challenges

One notable challenge autistic individuals may face during menstruation is heightened sensitivities. Sensory overload, a common experience for many autistic individuals, can become more frequent and intense just before and during menstruation. The combination of heightened sensory experiences and the discomfort of menstruation can be overwhelming. These sensitivities can manifest in various ways:

- ***Sensitivity to the Smell and Sight of Menstrual Blood:*** Some autistic individuals may find the smell and sight of menstrual blood particularly distressing or overwhelming. This heightened sensitivity can lead to discomfort and anxiety. You can read more about smell and sight sensitivities on our page.
- ***Increased General Bodily Sensitivity:*** Autistic individuals might experience more tenderness or some pain in certain areas of their body during menstruation, which can be uncomfortable or distressing. This is a common side effect for most individuals who experience menstruation.

Emotional Regulation

Emotional self-regulation, the ability to manage and calm one's emotions, can be challenging for autistic individuals during menstruation. Hormonal fluctuations that occur as part of the menstrual cycle can intensify emotions, making it harder to self-regulate. Executive function difficulties, such as difficulties with focus and organisation, can also be exacerbated during menstruation. This can impact an individual's ability to concentrate and manage daily tasks effectively.

Excessive Menstruation Symptoms

Autistic individuals may experience more severe menstrual symptoms compared to their neurotypical peers. These symptoms can include unusually painful periods and heavy menstrual bleeding. If these symptoms are excessively severe and affect daily life, it's essential to consult a healthcare provider for evaluation and guidance.



These challenges associated with menstruation can significantly impact the daily lives of autistic individuals. It's important to recognise and address these challenges to ensure they receive the support and accommodations they need during this natural process.

Supporting Autistic Individuals During Menstruation

Autistic individuals, like their neurotypical peers, may benefit from tailored support and information to navigate the challenges of menstruation. Starting early with preparation is key to ensuring a smoother experience. Here are some practical ways to support autistic individuals who may be about to experience or are experiencing menstruation:

- **Clear and Detailed Guidance:** Start by offering clear and detailed explanations about what happens when their period begins. Use accurate anatomical terms to prevent confusion and anxiety. Avoid euphemisms and slang, as these can be unclear and cause unnecessary stress. Instead, use straightforward language to describe the process and related ideas.

- **Visual Strategies:** Utilise visual strategies such as demonstrations, illustrations, social stories, books, pictures, and videos. Visual aids can help individuals better understand the menstrual process and what they need to do to manage it.
- **Information on Menstrual Products:** Teach them where to buy and how to use various menstrual products. Use visuals, like demonstrating with a pen where a sanitary towel should be placed in underwear. Also, provide guidance on changing products and maintaining hygiene.
- **Reminders and Period Tracking:** Assist them in setting a schedule and reminders for changing used products. Consistency is key to managing menstruation effectively. Show them how to use a period tracking app or a calendar to understand their menstrual cycle better and receive reminders of when their period will likely start.
- **Designated Support Person:** Help them identify a trusted person they can turn to if they start their period at school or in public settings.

- **Alternative Facilities:** If communal toilets are distressing for them, discuss the possibility of access to alternative facilities with their school or workplace. Having a private and comfortable space can make a significant difference.

Strategies for Self-Management

Self-management during menstruation can empower autistic individuals to navigate this natural process more independently. Here are some strategies that may prove helpful:

- **Always Carry Supplies:** Suggest carrying extra underwear and period products a week before their expected period. Recommend keeping spares in frequently visited places like a family member's house.
- **Period Tracking Apps and Reminders:** Period tracking apps provide insights into their menstrual cycle and send reminders about their period's likely start date. Setting alerts or reminders during their period for changing period products and when to wash can be especially useful.

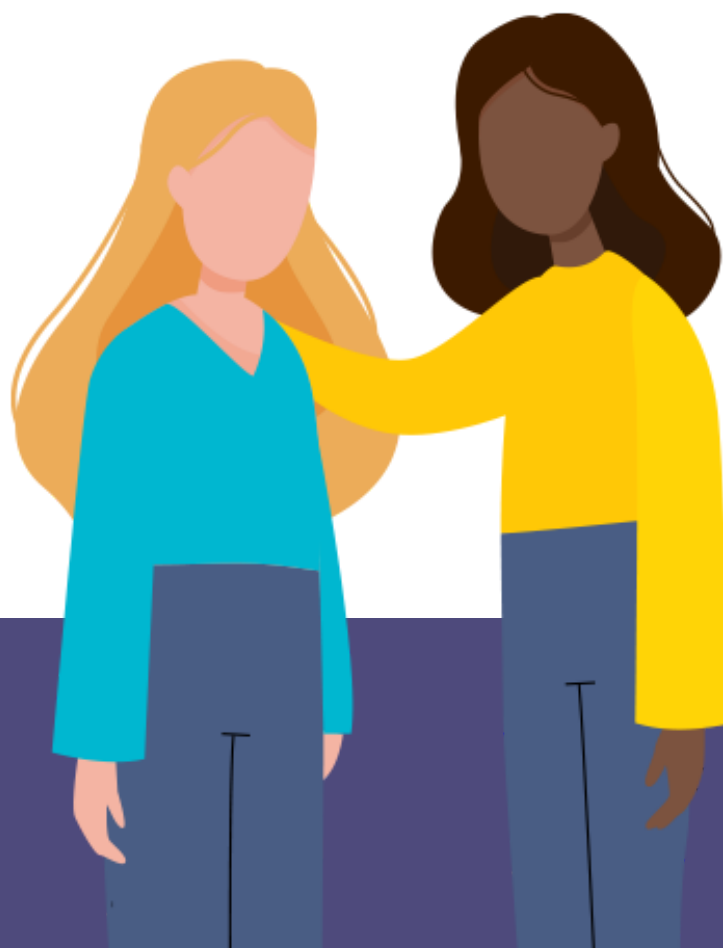
- **Consider Hormonal Contraception:** If appropriate, recommend discussing hormonal contraception, such as 'the pill,' with a doctor. This can make the menstrual cycle more predictable and reduce symptoms like PMS.
- **Emotional Tracking:** Suggest keeping a diary or using a period tracking app to monitor emotions during the menstrual cycle. This practice can help them recognise and understand the emotional changes associated with their period.

These strategies can empower autistic individuals to take control of their menstrual health and navigate the challenges that may arise with greater confidence and independence.



Open and clear communication about menstruation is vital for every girl. However, this can be challenging, especially for non-verbal individuals. This is where app2vox steps in. app2vox, a free Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) app designed for tablets and smartphones, supports individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) on their communication journey, bridging gaps and fostering connections.

If you're interested in learning more about app2vox and how it can benefit your loved ones or students on the spectrum, please register your interest [here](#). Together, we can create a more inclusive and understanding world for everyone.



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