

## MANAGING MENSTRUATION: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS WITH DISABLED CHILDREN



It is common for parents and caregivers of females with disabilities to worry how their daughters will cope when they get their first period. This is because females with disabilities often have added struggles during menstruation. They might have more difficulty communicating their needs and pain levels. Or they may have a more difficult time practicing proper menstrual hygiene.

Fortunately, there are lots of things you can do as a parent or caregiver to help your daughter navigate their first period and develop good menstrual hygiene habits.

### When will my daughter get her first period and why?

Menstruation typically begins around the age of 12-13 years and will continue until your daughter reaches menopause. Menstruation is the last step in your daughter's pubertal development. Menstruation results from the shedding of the inside lining of the uterus (the endometrium) combined with blood.

### How can I help prepare my daughter for her first period?

It is important for you to communicate with your daughter before she reaches puberty and gets her first period. This way she will know what to expect. Try and provide her with as much information about puberty and menstruation as she is able to understand.

- Tell her what to expect and what will happen during her period in a way she can understand.
- Ask her to let you know when she gets her first period if she is able to.
- Explain to her what her role will be in helping to care for herself when she does get her period. Some girls may be able to care for themselves but others might need more help.

### How to help your daughter manage her periods

- Keep a calendar and record the start and end dates of your daughter's periods. Keep note of how heavy they are each month and write down any additional concerns you notice. This will help you better prepare for her period every month once you notice patterns. Another option is to use a period tracking mobile app. (examples: Period Tracker, Clue, etc.).
- Teach your daughter proper menstrual hygiene practices and make sure she has access to all products she will need, if she is able to use them.
- If your daughter wears a diaper it is recommended to put a pad inside the diaper and change the pad when needed to reduce the amount of diapers used per day.
- Use unscented soap or water to properly clean the vulvar (outside area of the female genitalia) area as scented products and harsh soaps can cause irritation.

## Managing pain during menstruation

It may be hard to know if your daughter is experiencing pain with her period, especially if she is unable to tell you. Look for changes in mood or behaviour during or before her periods as an indicator of pain.

Ibuprofen can help with painful cramps that some females have during menstruation. You can buy over the counter pain medication like ibuprofen at your local pharmacy. Ibuprofen should be started once any pain, even if mild, is noted and given over the full course of their period to help lessen cramping.

If these medications do not work to reduce pain, talk to your health-care provider about other pain relief options.

## Stopping your daughter's period

Many parents or caregivers of girls with disabilities want to know if they can use medication to help stop their daughter's period. There is no evidence that shows stopping a woman's period will cause harm to her health. However, like any medication, there are risks with taking any hormonal medication long-term.

Your health-care provider can discuss these risks with you when you meet to discuss stopping your daughter's period.

## How are periods stopped?

Periods are stopped using hormonal medications. These can lessen or stop a female's period altogether. These hormones come in the form of hormonal control (also known as birth control). There are many different hormonal control options that can be taken. All hormonal control options are safe; however, some forms of hormonal control may be safer for certain people compared to others. Your health-care provider will go through all the pros and cons and help you choose a hormonal medication that is best suited for your daughter. We can't guarantee that we will be able to completely stop a period but we can guarantee we will work together to find what works best for your daughter.

### Types of hormonal medications

- **Hormonal control pills and patches contain estrogen and progesterone.**  
Hormonal control pills are taken once per day at the same time every day. Hormonal control patches are changed weekly. Pills and patches are used for three weeks and then stopped for a week to allow a natural, lighter timed period to happen. Hormonal control pills or patches can also be taken for longer periods of time to completely get rid of a period for many months.
- **Hormonal control injections like Depo-Provera®**  
These can be given every three months to stop periods. These injections contain only progesterone.
- **The hormonal IUD (Mirena or Kyleena)**  
This is a small device that is inserted into the uterus and releases hormones (progesterone) to stop periods and cramping associated with periods. A doctor will insert the IUD in the operating room. In order to make the process as comfortable as possible for your daughter, she will either be put to sleep or given medication to make her more relaxed during the procedure. Once an IUD is placed in the uterus it will remain effective for five years.

### How long does it take for a period to stop?

Hormonal control options will not stop a girl's period immediately. There will be random vaginal bleeding, which can vary from light to heavy, for the first few months after starting a hormonal control option. This is common for anyone who begins taking hormonal control. If there is significant bleeding or bleeding becomes unmanageable then it is recommended to talk to your health care provider about this as the hormonal control option may need to be switched or tests may need to be done.

### Did you know?

Menstrual products are readily available and free of charge at CHEO. If you need to change your daughter's sanitary products while at CHEO you can use the fully accessible bathroom located in the Gynecology Clinic waiting room.

## Need information? Visit [cheo.on.ca](https://cheo.on.ca)

Use our handy search tool to find CHEO-approved health resources, clinic information and much, much more!



## Have you registered for MyChart?

MyChart is a **FREE** secure, online patient portal that connects patients to parts of their CHEO electronic health record, anywhere, at any time.

To apply for MyChart access, visit [cheo.on.ca/mychart](https://cheo.on.ca/mychart) and fill out the MyChart access request form. Once your application has been approved, we'll send you an email with an activation code and instructions on how to

