

# Challenging menstrual stigma and supporting menstrual health in sport and education

Dr Petra Kolić

4<sup>th</sup> October 2023



**RISE**

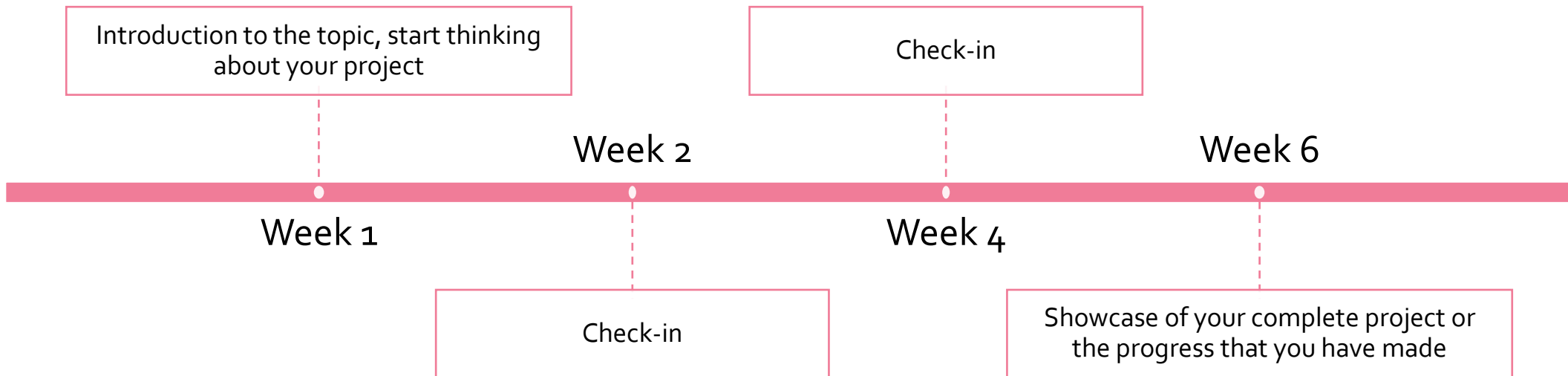


# *Timeline of your RISE project*





Associated Badges:



200 RISE points



# *Introduction*

-  Having a menstrual cycle is a marker of health, especially during the reproductive years of menstruating people.
-  Roughly half of the worldwide population menstruate at some point in their lives.
-  Even though menstruation is a normal, biological process, it can also be a source of embarrassment, shame, and stigma.
-  Balancing act for educators and sports workers: Not all girls / women menstruate, not all menstruating people can / want to talk about menstruation, not all girls / women have the same knowledge about menstruation

# *Why do we need to talk about menstruation?*

## Preparation

To help others prepare for navigating their personal menstrual experiences

## Respect

To respect the decisions and choices of others (e.g., culture, religion)

## Openness

To be open to learn new knowledge and appreciate the experiences of others

## Preparation

## Empathy

## Respect

## Information

## Openness

## Dignity

## Empathy

To show others emotional support as and when they need it

## Information

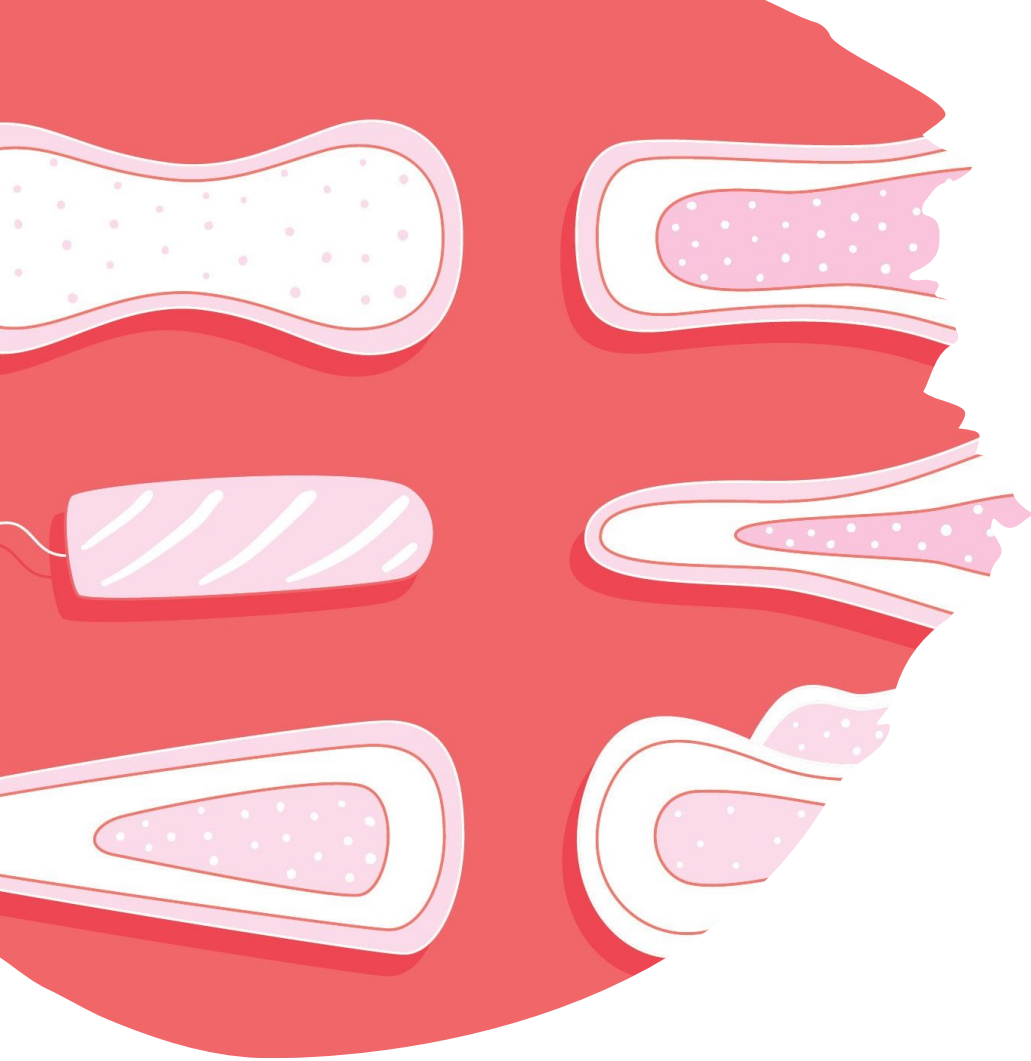
To understand what is / is not normal and act upon this appropriately

## Dignity

To help each other navigate menstruation without shame or fear

# *What we will cover today*

- 1 What is menstruation and the menstrual cycle? What are typical symptoms?
- 2 Coping strategies to manage menstruation
- 3 Sport, school (and other fields!) and menstruation
- 4 Your RISE project



## *Menstruation and the menstrual cycle*

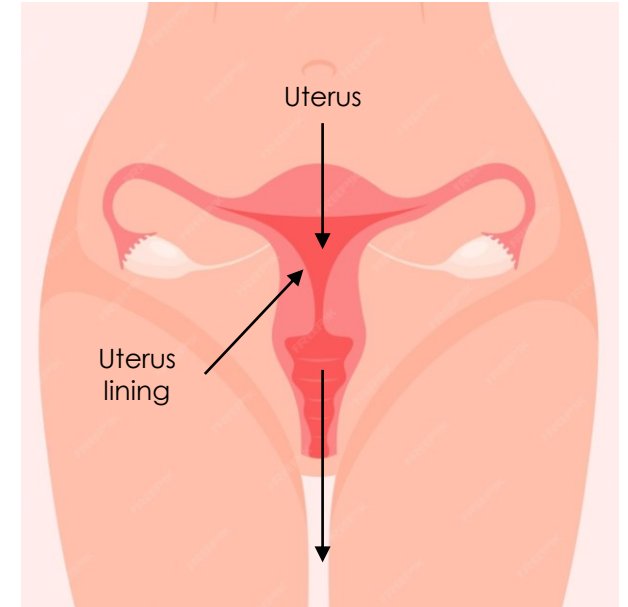
# *Activity 1*

## ***Let's look at your knowledge:***

1. What is menstruation (also known as the period)?
2. What names have you heard others use / have used yourself to describe menstruation?
3. Why do people have periods?
4. What is the difference between menstruation and the menstrual cycle?

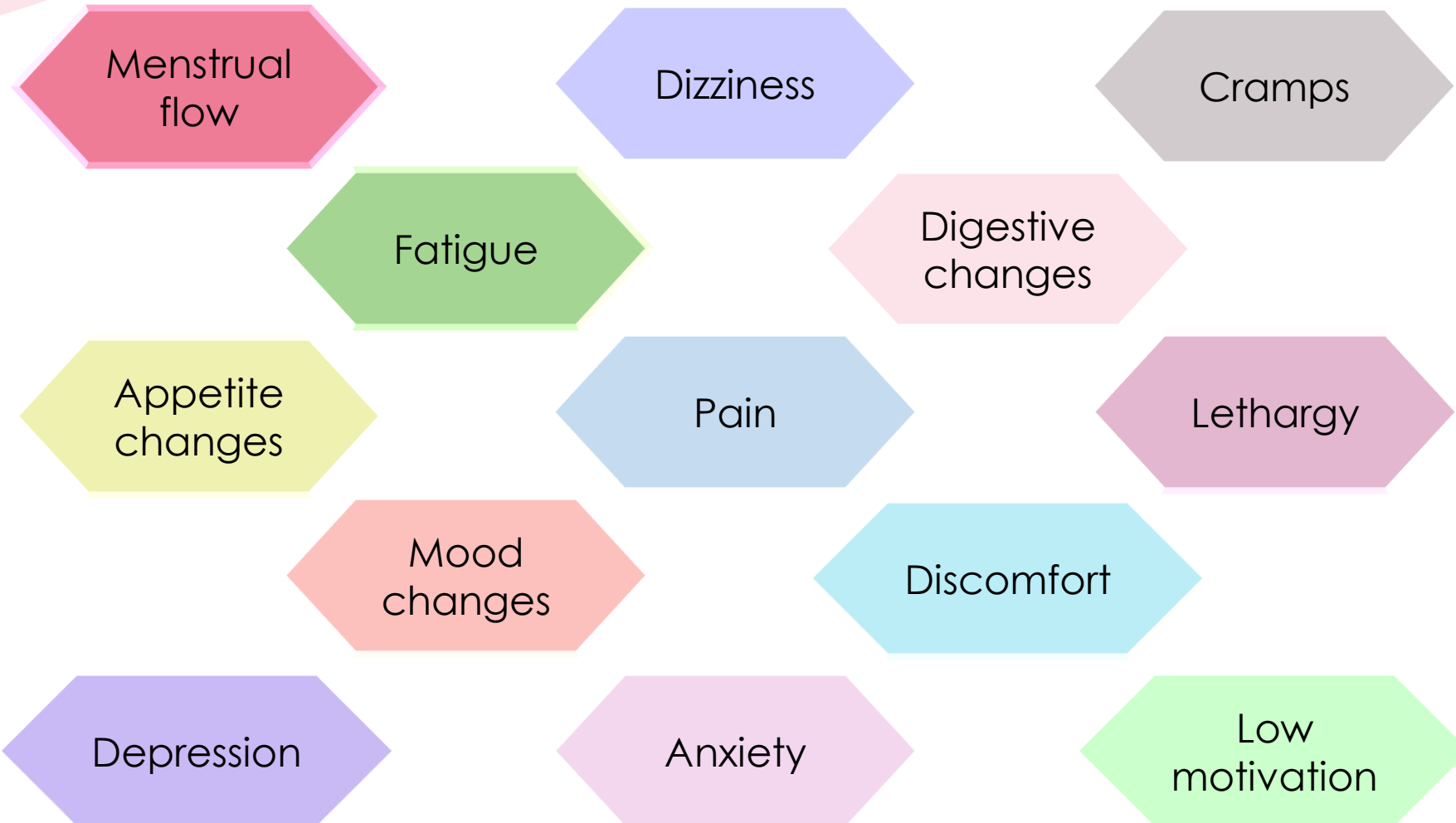
# *What is menstruation?*

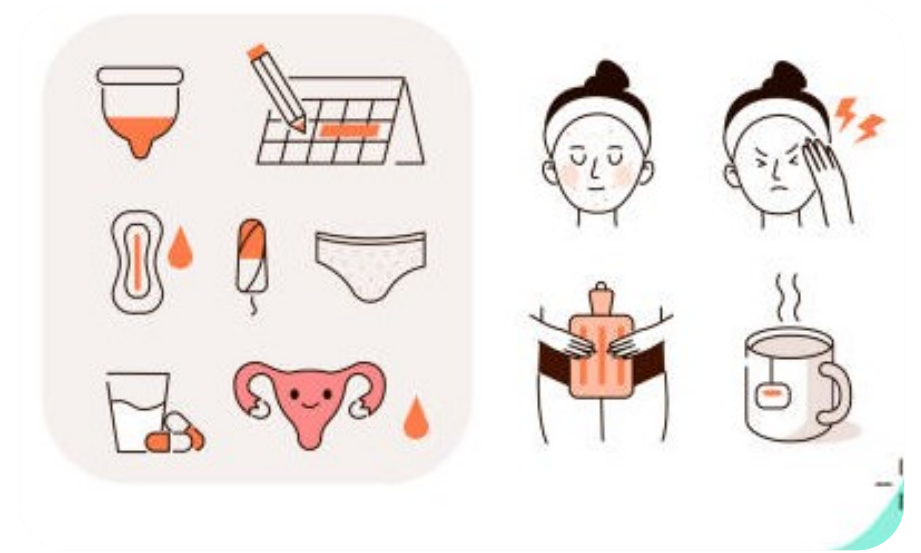
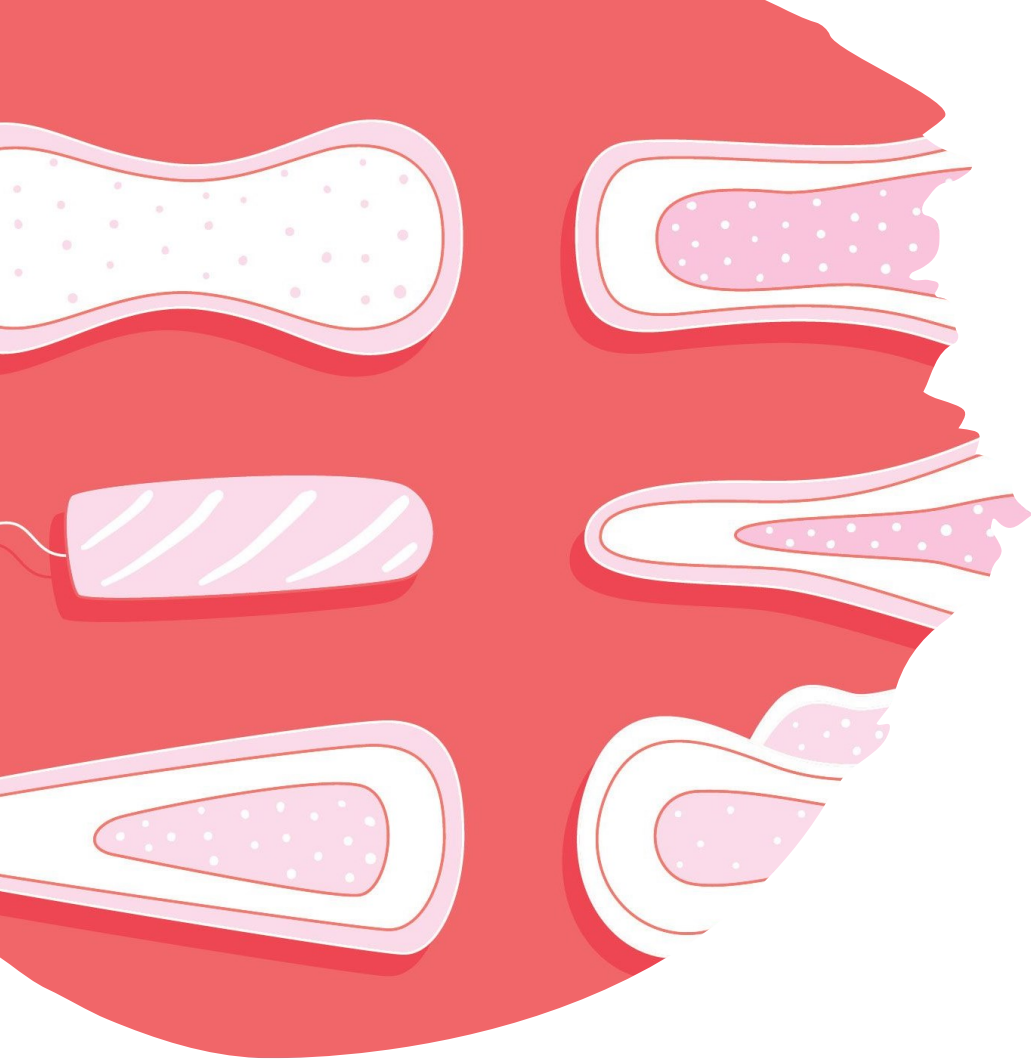
- Menstruation marks the start of every menstrual cycle. It occurs when there is no pregnancy.
- During menstruation, the lining of the uterus sheds and menstrual fluid (blood, mucus) leaves the body.
- Across the world, there are over 5000 terms used to describe menstruation.
- Some terms are used because people find it awkward, embarrassing or shameful to talk about menstruation.





# *Typical menstrual symptoms*





## ***Coping strategies during menstruation***

## *Activity 2*

### ***Reflect upon the following questions:***

1. What does “coping with the period” look like for you?
2. Think about your personal experiences, reading, talking to others: What are typical coping strategies?
3. Having identified a range of strategies, how would you group them into different forms / types of coping?

# *How to cope? What to do?*

## Menstrual products

Tampons, pads, cup, period pants

## Avoidance

Work, school, friends, exercise

## Adaptation

Remote working, selective avoidance

## Clothing

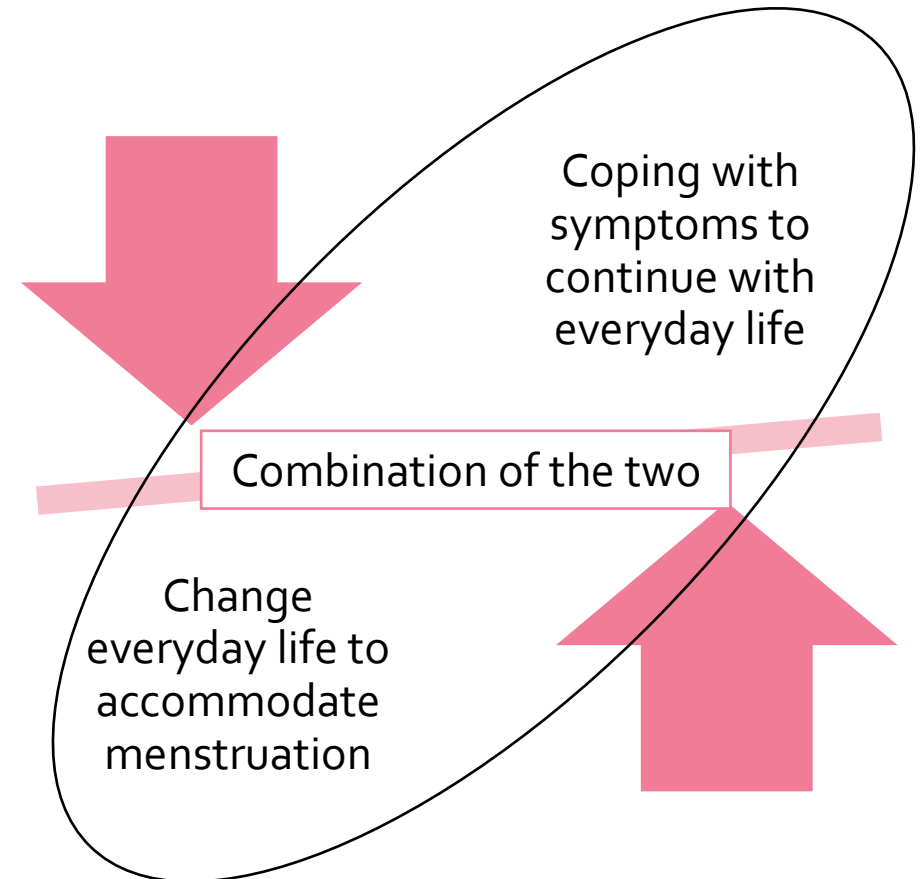
Dark, loose, tight, oversized Tee

## Underwear

Double pants, "granny knickers", thongs

## Silence

Disguise of menstruation while keeping up with daily life



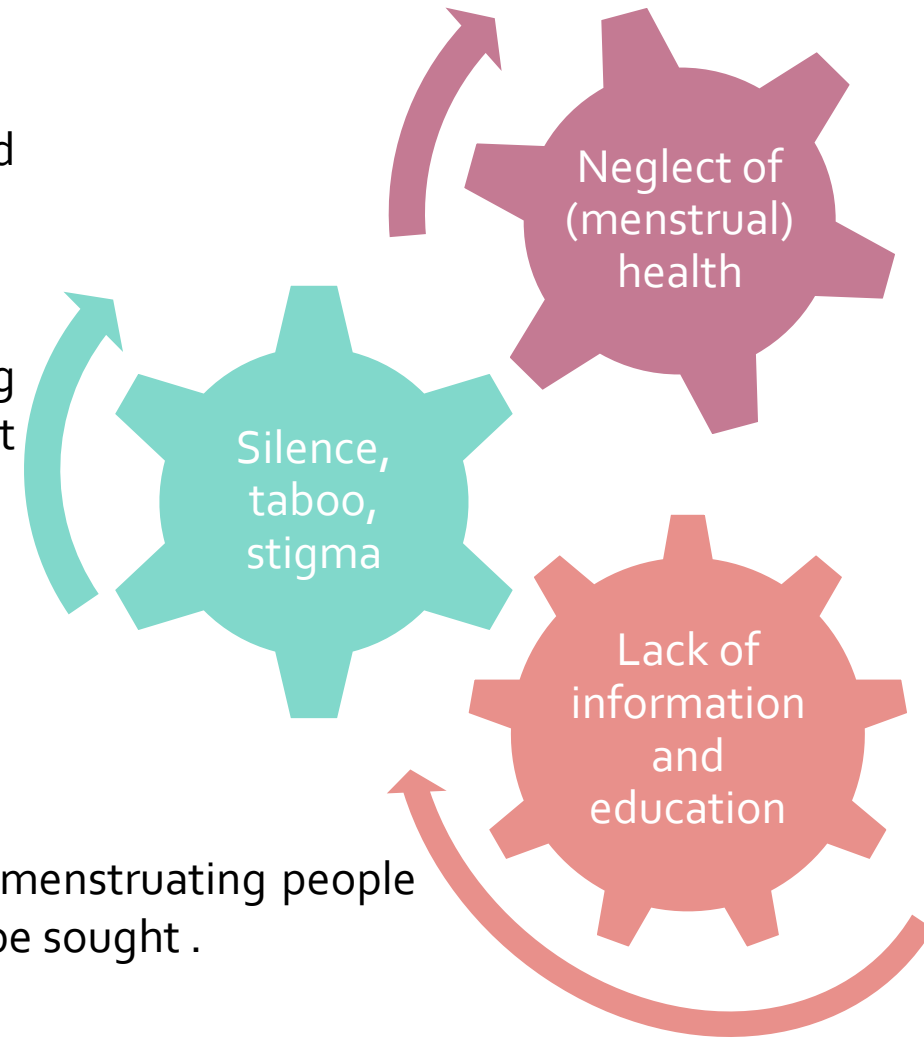
# *Some issues related to coping*

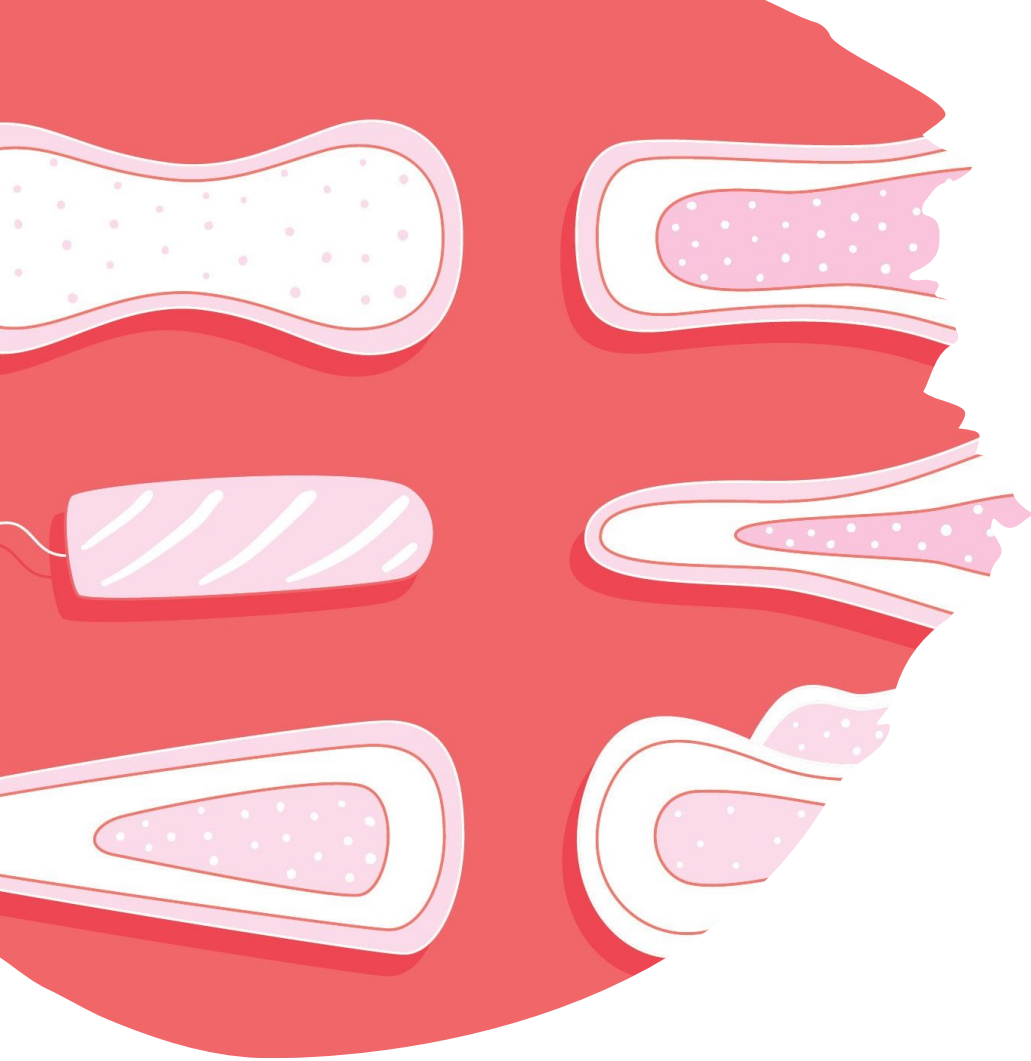
💧 Coping strategies are developed through experience, good and bad (e.g., leaking in public).

💧 Lack of information, education, and support in developing coping strategies elevates menstruation to being something that must remain private in public spaces.

💧 Think back to the previous slide of coping symptoms!  
→ What do many of the coping strategies have in common?

💧 Silence, taboo, stigma associated with menstruation can prevent menstruating people to learn what is normal, what is not normal, and when help should be sought .





OH, THAT'S  
~~GROSS~~  
~~WEIRD~~  
~~DIRTY~~  
NORMAL.


***Sport, school, and  
menstruation***


## *Activity 3*


### ***Reflect upon the following questions:***


1. Think about your current role / subject you are studying / future careers – what scenarios do you envisage to experience? In what situations might you face menstruation?
2. What challenges do you believe that the menstruating people in your environment face?
3. What challenges do you believe you will face in supporting menstruating people in this environment?

# *Your roles and responsibilities*

 Those working in sport and education are key gatekeepers to achieve various objectives that extend beyond the primary aims within their profession – e.g., social inclusion, communication, leadership, other transferable skills.

 Key moments with participants / students – think about the little interactions before / after sessions or lessons, teachers: no toilet break rule during class?!, what happens or could happen during a session / lesson?

 At the very least, it is essential to be prepared when confronted with menstruation – e.g., a student leaks during class or a girl starts her period while under your care.

 We want to create safe and open spaces, where communication about any topic is ok!



# *Things to consider*

- Age and Religion and Culture and Ethnicity
- Characteristics of the group
- Time
- Format of your interaction
- Resources
- Your other responsibilities and objectives
- Support system outside interactions with you

# *How to support (only a few examples!)*

Provide free menstrual products

Develop and distribute resources relevant to the people you are working with






Offer a physical space to talk about menstruation

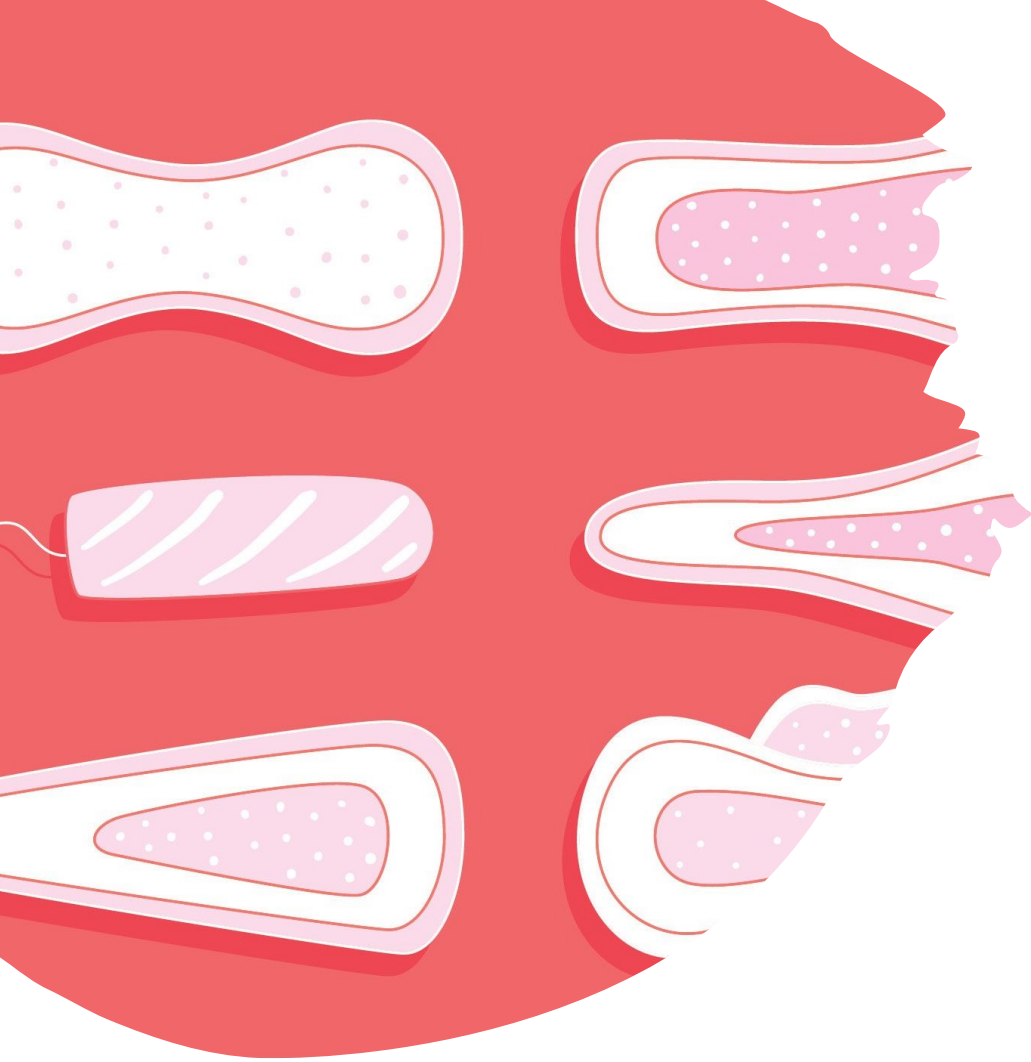
Integrate menstruation as a topic of delivery

Host events aimed at education about menstruation

Offer an (anonymous) (online) platform to share menstrual concerns and questions

# *What to do when you cannot support*

-  Offer aforementioned opportunities (those that are relevant) without putting pressure on anyone having to engage.
-  Implement things that are remote, easy to access, and anonymous.
-  In larger group situations, continue to advocate for menstrual openness and communication.
-  Continue to develop your own knowledge around menstruation.
-  Seek to understand the barriers that might prevent (pre)menstruating people to engage with the support you offer and / or other resources available.



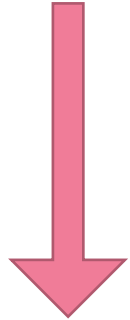
## *Your RISE project*

## *Activity 4*

### ***Reflect upon the following questions:***

1. What do you hope to achieve during this RISE project?
2. What would you like to create? What will the end-product look like?
3. Who will you target with your creation?
4. How do you think you can implement your creation?

# *Recap of the RISE project*



Week 1	4 <sup>th</sup> Oct 23	In-person workshop
Week 2	11 <sup>th</sup> Oct 23	Check-in
Week 4	25 <sup>th</sup> Oct 23	Check-in
Week 6	8 <sup>th</sup> Nov 23	Showcase workshop

The aim is to ...

- Be creative
- Develop problem solving and scenario thinking
- Develop a meaningful resource without the pressure of having / wanting to achieve a certain grade

Over the course of six weeks, you will develop your own project on the topic(s) of menstrual health and / or menstrual stigma.

Topic of your choice ✓

For the group of your choice ✓

In a format of your choice ✓

# Example project outputs

**LET'S START THE CONVERSATION ABOUT MENSTRUATION!**

**MENTRUAL HYGIENE IS FUNDAMENTAL TO:**

- EDUCATION
- HEALTH
- EMPLOYMENT
- FINANCIAL STABILITY

**MENTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT (MHM)**

**REALITY:** Clean and sanitary products are essential and should be available at schools, at the workplace, in universities, at public spaces and at home.

**FACTS:** Facilitate information and education about menstruation by using visual materials and posters, use the media, and at home, too.

**HYGIENE:** Hygienic sanitary products are easily accessible and affordable. Use them regularly and safely.

**HYGIENE MATERIALS & SAFE DISPOSAL:** Menstruation is considered normal. Taboos and stigmas are being shed.

**NO TABOOS**

**WHAT CAN WE DO?**

- TALK!
- SUPPORT!
- CELEBRATE!



The diagram shows a section through the human female reproductive system.

(a) (i) How often are eggs normally released in the female reproductive system? [1]

(ii) In which labelled part is an egg normally fertilised by a sperm? [1]

(b) Fill the two gaps in the sentences below.

A fertilised egg divides into a tiny ball of cells called an embryo.

The embryo attaches to the lining of the uterus. Here the embryo grows to become an unborn baby, called a \_\_\_\_\_.

It takes about \_\_\_\_\_ months for a baby to develop [2]

(c) Some women have blocked fallopian tubes.

How might this prevent fertilisation taking place? [2]

## FINDING THE SANITARY PROTECTION THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

We all have different needs when it comes to sanitary protection. Like you, your period is unique and despite how similar you and your BFF might be, you may have completely different experiences!

We are here to help you discover what's best for you and we're confident you will find something in our LiL-Lets range to suit you.

**PADS**

A lot of girls choose to use pads (or towels) when they start their period. Pads are rectangles of absorbent material that you stick to the inside of your underwear. Most of them have wings that wrap around your underwear to help them stay in place. Pads also come in different sizes for heavier and lighter periods and should generally be changed every 3 to 5 hours.

- Day** - Light to medium flow
- Long** - Medium to heavy flow or for those that prefer a long pad
- Night** - Very heavy flow and a restful night's sleep or for those who prefer an extra-long pad.

If you like our LiL-Lets teens pads and feel ready to move on from the LiL-Lets teens range, why not try our LiL-Lets adults pads available in both ultra thin and maxi thick styles.

## PERIODS what & why

what you need to know

All girls and women will start their periods at some time. This booklet tells you what to do when you start having them too.

**What & Why**

A period is bleeding through a girl's or woman's vagina (va-j-i-n-a) that lasts for a few days.

Q When will my periods start? eight years old? 12 years old? 18 years old?

A Usually when you are between 11 and 15 but you could be anything from eight to 18. Your periods will start when your body is ready. You can't make them start or stop them from starting.

YUK! Zee!

The changes do with growing up are called puberty (pew-ber-tee). During puberty your breasts will start to grow, and hair begins to grow under your arms and between your legs. Changes also happen inside your body, preparing your body for having a baby one day.

What's she DOING in there?

My two best friends have started their periods. I'm 12 and worried that it hasn't happened to me yet.

Has she started yet?

Put your thumb and fingers together in a triangle like in this picture. The space between your thumb and index finger is a rough idea of where your ovaries and uterus (yo-to-us) are inside your body, and how much space they take up. The uterus is also called the womb (womb).

Even before birth, a woman has 1-2 million tiny eggs in her ovaries (over-ees). When you reach puberty usually one egg is released every month from your ovaries (ovulation). The egg is tiny - much smaller than in the diagrams on this page. The egg moves along the fallopian (fo-loo-pa-an) tube to your uterus. The uterus is where a baby would grow if the egg were fertilised (fur-ti-fized) by sperm from a man.

Every month, an egg leaves the ovary...

...and travels down the fallopian tube.

Your uterus gets ready for a possible pregnancy each month and its lining becomes thick and soft. If an egg is not fertilised and does not implant in the uterus to start a baby, the uterus lining passes out of your body as blood through your vagina. This is your period.

I need to meet a sperm!

## Should I train based on menstrual cycle phase?

There are large differences in the hypertrophic response to strength training between individuals (women but also men).

Men and women respond similarly to resistance training (increases in muscle mass and strength)

Not likely that there are differences in the effects of resistance exercise training within a person.

Training based on cyclical hormonal changes is not an evidence-based approach

even though hormone levels may vary during the menstrual cycle.

mysportscience

www.mysportscience.com

Colenso-Semple et al. Front. Sports Act. Living. 5, 2023

# *Thank you*

Dr Petra Kolić

P.Kolic@mmu.ac.uk

Institute of Sport 2.01

