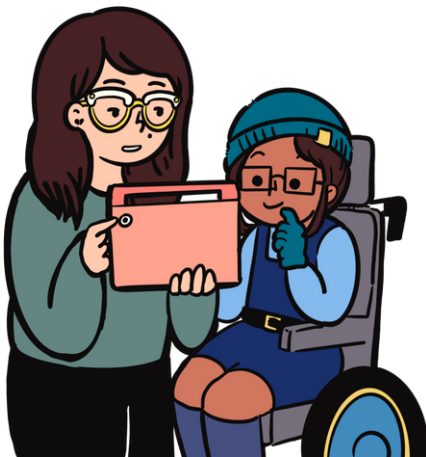


# Periods and Communication



- Ensure that a young person who uses an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) device has access to phrases and words that allow them to communicate their needs or symptoms, like pain.

- If you are providing assistance to a young person with menstrual hygiene tasks, tell them how you will help them. Facilitate speech and language production by verbalizing phrases while you complete tasks. For example, say, "washing your hands" while washing your hands.



- Use a visual schedule to provide young people with a predictable list of expected behaviors. A visual schedule can be helpful for an entire daily routine or for individual tasks, like changing a pad.

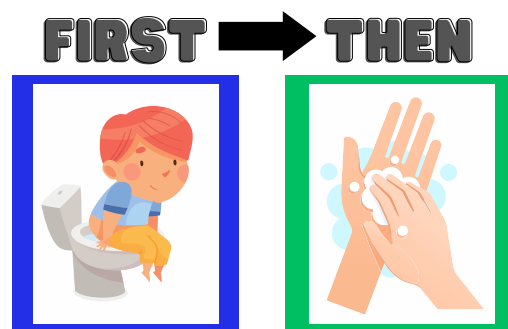
## Periods and Visual Supports

Visual supports use images or graphics to communicate a message. Some people benefit from using visual supports to help with participating in routines, schedules, or activities. Visual supports can be customized to best support the person using them. For menstrual hygiene, visual supports can help a person understand what they are expected to do. Visual supports can be beneficial for:

- impulse control
- memory
- sequencing
- attention
- organization
- planning
- confidence
- self-regulation

Some examples of visual supports include first/then charts, visual schedules, or social stories. Read more about them below:

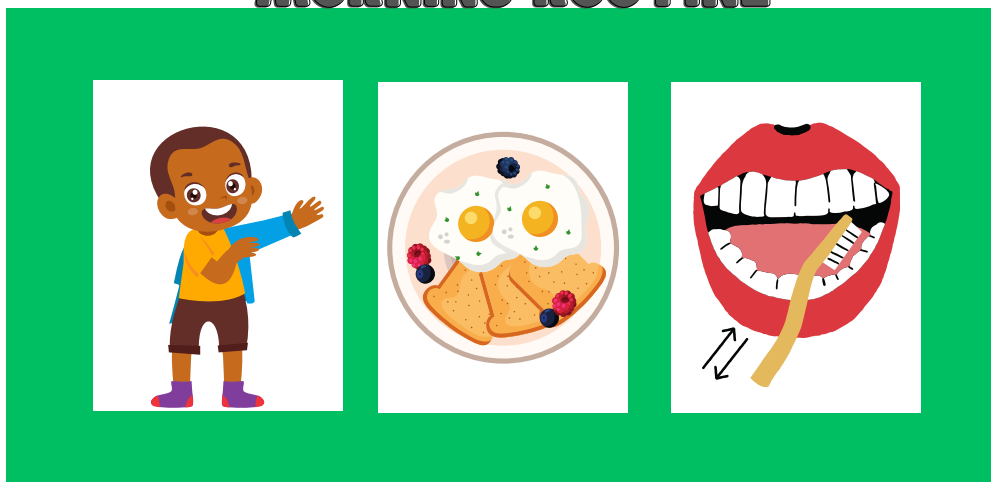
- A **first/then chart** is a simple visual aid that shows the "first" thing that will be done followed by what will happen after or "then". First/then charts commonly use a preferred activity in the "then" spot as a motivation to do what is "first", but can also be used to teach the steps to an activity. The first/then chart shown here tells a person that they will first use the toilet, then wash their hands.



## Periods and Visual Supports

- A **visual schedule** uses images, usually on cards, that show a sequence of steps for an activity or routine. Some people benefit from physically moving the cards to an "all done" pile after the step is completed. The visual schedule shown here shows the steps to a morning routine. A person using this schedule will see that they will first get dressed, then eat breakfast, then brush their teeth.

### MORNING ROUTINE



- **Social stories** are a type of visual aid that use words and images in the form of short stories or books. Social stories can be helpful for presenting information about expected social behaviors. You can find a variety of social stories that talk about puberty and periods online.



## Periods and Visual Supports

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The resources below show examples of visual supports for periods and menstrual hygiene management:

- [Story About When to Change My Pad](#)



- [Story About Getting My Period](#)



- [Story About How to Change My Pad](#)



These resources were developed to be used as social stories, but you can be creative with how you use them. Here are some tips for using these visual supports:

- Print out the page. Read each box out loud. Look at and describe the images in each box. Then, introduce the activity. Talk about the social story that you read while doing the activity.
- Print out the page. Cut each box out. Laminate the boxes to make them more durable. Use velcro or magnets to attach each box to a board or wall. Move each box to an "all done" column.
- Write out or draw out your own visual schedule on a dry-erase board. You can use the steps included in these social stories as inspiration for your own schedule or story.
- Be consistent about how you use your visual supports. Use the same type of visual supports at home and at school.

# Periods and Occupational Therapy

## How can an occupational therapist help?

- Occupational therapists are trained to improve health and quality of life by addressing the barriers that impact participation in daily activities, like managing menstrual hygiene.



An occupational therapist can assist with improving your experiences with menstrual hygiene management by providing family-centered, strengths-based interventions in areas like:

- education about menstruation and puberty
- socioemotional health
- functional cognition supports
- positioning and adaptive seating
- sensory-based supports
- physical comfort
- behavioral supports
- social skills supports
- medication management
- functional communication supports
- task-specific training for menstrual hygiene tasks
- task-specific adaptations
- independence with prerequisite skills (dressing, toileting, hygiene and grooming)
- family and caregiver training

# Medical Management of Menstruation

Some people choose to pursue medical methods for managing periods. Speak with your doctor about your concerns regarding the management of periods to see if medical methods are right for you.



When making decisions about medically managing menstruation, these factors should be considered and prioritized:

- **Patient autonomy and shared decision-making:** The person who is menstruating is the most important person on the healthcare team. It is critical to include the young person in the decisions that affect them.
- **Anticipatory guidance:** The transition to having periods can be made easier with anticipatory guidance. Begin the conversation early to gain the skills that are required.
- **Counseling:** Before resorting to medications or procedures to manage periods, extensive counseling must occur. Counseling must include information about potential side effects, benefits, and/or risks.
- **Patient benefit versus caregiver convenience:** Before choosing to medically suppress periods, ask who will be primarily benefitting from this choice. The primary outcome of this decision should be improved quality of life for the young person.

# Periods and Support People

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- All support people, including but not limited to teachers, healthcare providers, parents, or peers, can play a role in supporting a young person in knowing about periods. Provide consistent guidance across groups.
- Do not assume that a young person has already received the comprehensive and holistic education about their period that they deserve.
- Educate yourself. Learn about puberty and periods so that you can comfortably answer the questions that a young person asks you. Provide a safe space for asking questions.
- Check with your school about their policies for assisting with toileting tasks at school.
- Establish clear expectations for support people who are assisting with menstrual hygiene management. Clear expectations can help young people recognize and report abuse.
- If you are providing physical assistance for menstrual hygiene tasks:
  - Practice proper body mechanics to protect your own body. It may be easier to complete tasks like putting on pants or underwear in bed.
  - Tell the child how you are going to help them before and during. Offer choices and ask for consent.
- Take a young person's concerns seriously. A person may confide in you with reports of pain or worries. You may be the first or only person that they feel comfortable giving this information to.

## Periods and Support People: Talking About Periods

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- **Practice early and often.** The transition to periods can be easier if you begin conversations about periods before they occur. A child could be more fearful about their period if they do not know what is happening. Children will not learn what they need to know in one conversation. A child should be able to shower, change their clothes, toilet, and wash their hands if expected to adapt to a menstrual hygiene routine.
- **Use gender-neutral terminology.** Not all people who menstruate are girls/women. Saying, "people who get periods", "people who menstruate", or "people with uteruses" is more inclusive to nonbinary or transgender people who menstruate. Additionally, do not refer to menstrual products as feminine products.
- **Model positivity.** A young person's feelings about periods can be influenced by yours. Be mindful of the language that you use. Give the child reassurance about any difficulties that they may face. Model calm attitudes in response to the young person's confusion, worries, or mistakes.
- **Embrace individual differences.** Everyone's period manifests itself differently. Additionally, everyone learns differently. Each person will have different goals, needs, and overall experiences. Individualize your supports to best support your young person. Provide various teaching opportunities and tools, like short videos, modeling, group lessons, or handouts.



## Periods and Support People: Talking About Periods

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- **Use specific, accurate, and detailed examples.** Use formal words for body parts to prevent confusion. Refer to anatomically correct models or physical menstrual hygiene materials when possible.
- **Create a safe space.** Children may feel worried, embarrassed, or confused when learning about puberty or periods. Create a non-judgemental space to ask questions. If talking with a group, it may be helpful to create and agree on rules for the group discussion at the start of the session.
- **Promote autonomy.** Provide plentiful opportunities to practice and build skills to improve the experience of menstrual hygiene management. All young menstruators have the right to learn about and care for their own bodies.